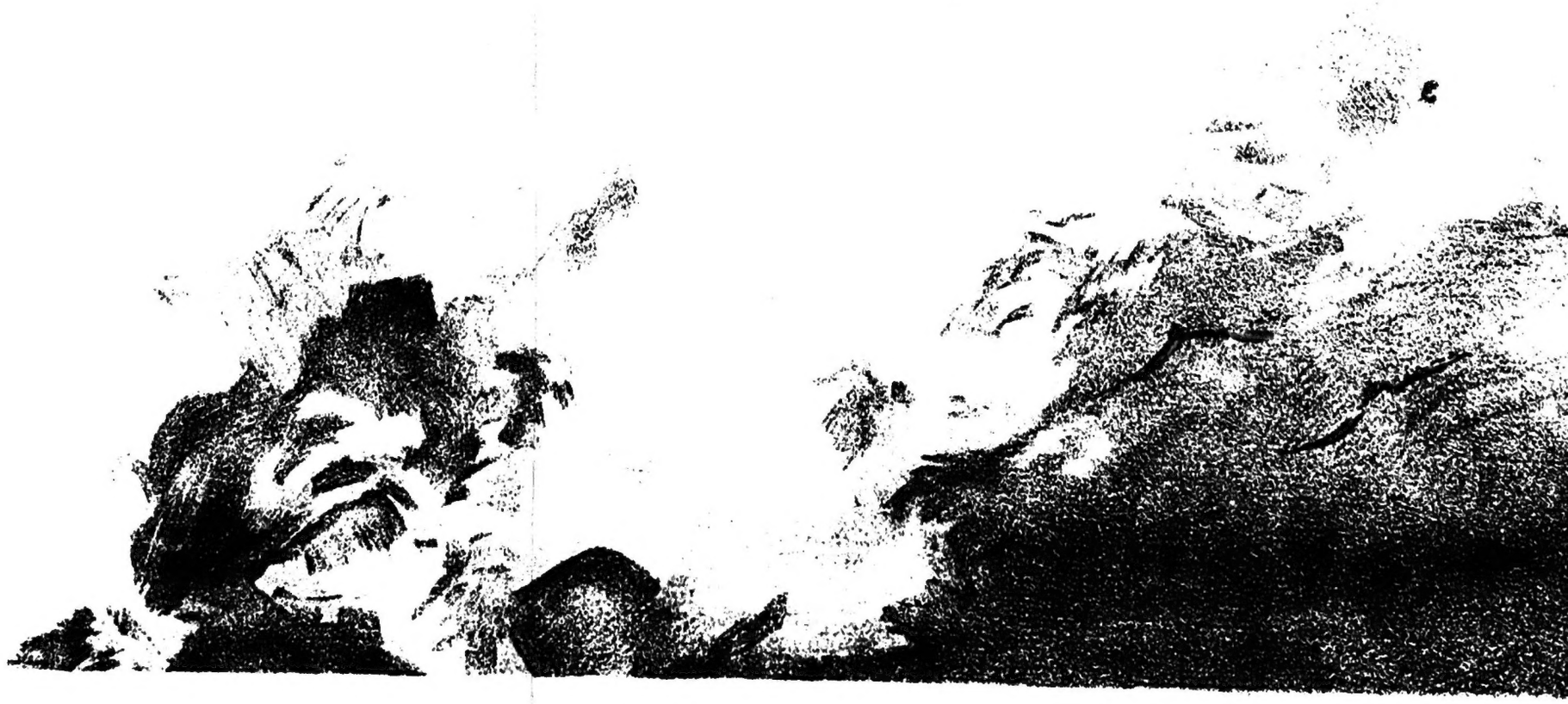

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THE GREAT CRELLIN COMET.

By George Griffith.

IN the first place, perhaps, I had better say at once by way of introduction that the greatest and most imminent peril that the planet Terra has ever been threatened with since it became a world suited to the habitation of men and monkeys, would never have been averted if, in the first place, Mr. Emerson G. Crellin had not made a practically uncountable and ever-increasing pile of dollars by almost every one of the multifarious methods known to the dollar-piling genius of the Great Republic, and if, in the second place, he had not been possessed of two hobbies upon either of which he was prepared to spend the last dollar in his bottomless pockets.

As it would be difficult to say which of these hobbies was to him the more important, we may take as the first of them that which was calculated to bulk most largely in the eyes of the world. This was astronomy. Among the many millionaire countrymen of his who have so magnificently endowed the temples of this noblest of the sciences Emerson G. Crellin was determined not to be the least. But what he had done for astronomy was done, not in his native land, but amidst the sylvan beauties of the Surrey hills, and it was here that his second hobby came in. He had a daughter, whom he had somewhat boldly but, as the event proved, justifiably, christened Auriole, and his twin ambition to that of finding the means of making wider and longer excursions into the realms of space than any one else had done was to see the glitter of a coronet—none of your newest-short-lived-up-with-the-last-social-earthquake coronets, as he put it, but one that could look back at least to the days when the world had not yet been enriched by the addition of what was someday to be the United States—shining on the brow of his darling Auriole.

It was this that had brought him with his millions and his modest ambitions to the country in which circumstances were most favourable to the working of such an investment, and this was also the reason why the famous Crellin Observatory and the immortal Crellin Reflector with its sixty-four inch object-glass was located on the Surrey hills instead of on the Alleghanies or the slopes of the Rockies. The observatory was built on the summit of Leith Hill, which had been acquired by the further acquisition and gift in perpetuity to the nation of an addition of about a thousand acres to Hurtwood Common. Leith Hill Place had been included in the purchase and exchange, and here dwelt the millionaire and his daughter with another member of the household who may as well be introduced at once.

[illegible] who had not only been a biassed opinion and he knew it. He knew also that his business at Leith Hill had only just as much to do with this world as was included within the fence which encircled the Observatory buildings. The rest was extra-terrestrial. He recognised, in short, that his proper place was far away in the fields of Space, among planets and suns and stars, star-mists and nebulæ, and that he had a great deal more concern with the eccentricity of the orbits of comets than he had with that of human nature complicated by attractions far more difficult of calculation than that of gravity.

He saw all this clearly and accepted the situation with perfect loyalty. He did not even admit to himself how powerful this attraction was for him. He only recognised that, to use an astronomical simile, conjunction was an impossibility, and that, so far as human probabilities went, it was not his destiny ever to become the companion of this radiant star, already as far removed from him in one sense as the stars which he could only see with the help of his huge telescope were in another.

As regards Miss Auriole herself, she also to all appearances accepted the situation in the most perfectly sensible fashion. She, too, knew her destiny and didn't appear to have the slightest objection to it. All that she stipulated for, as she had an

And yet, tired as he undoubtedly was, he did not take the path which led down to the house after he had let himself out of the inclosure. His work was over for the night and he might have gone to bed till lunch-time had he chosen. But instead of that, after another long look up at the Morning Star, he turned away with a sigh that might have been one of weariness or something else, and with his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets he began to walk with down-bent head andslow irregular strides westward towards Hurtwood Common.

When he sat down to breakfast that morning at half-past eight, Mr. Crellin said to him in the half-paternal, half-deferential tone in which he usually addressed him:

"Say, Professor, I guess I shall have to lock that observatory up and send you over to see how they're getting on with their star-finding and comet-hunting in the States. You're just wearing yourself out body and brain over this new comet of yours. Of course it's very satisfactory that the Crellin Reflector should have got hold of it before anyone else has a notion that there is such a thing knocking around, but still, you know, we can't have its discoverer wearing himself to a shadow before the time comes to take the glory of it."

"No, indeed, that's not to be talked about!" said Miss Auriole, looking with a just perceptible admiration at the still fairly substantial frame of the shadow, and as she did so it seemed to her, whether rightly or wrongly, that there was just a suspicion of a stoop in the broad shoulders, and ever so slight a falling forward of the well-poised, erectly carried head. "I do believe, Professor, that this is about the third night that you have had no sleep, and here, instead of getting in forty winks during the day, you've been blinding yourself over those wildernesses of figures and tangling your brain up with equations and cube roots, and things. I know something about them for I shall never forget my struggles with them at Vassar. Would it be impertinent to ask how much longer you are going to make yourself a martyr to science in this way?"

"Perhaps until the end of the——Good Heavens! what nonsense I am talking!" said the Professor, suddenly looking up from his plate with the expression of a man just awakened from a dream. "I really do think I have been going too long without sleep and I must try and get some to-day. You see, the man who discovers a new comet is like one of the old discoverers the first time he sighted the shore of a new continent. The temptation to go on is irresistible, and one is apt to forget that, after all, a brain is something else than a machine. Still I don't think you need have any anxiety about me. You know I have learnt to take my sleep as a Red Indian takes his meals, and when I have settled the question of this precious comet I shall probably go to bed and stop there the best part of a week."

"The question?" echoed Mr. Crellin. "What's that? I didn't know there was any question about it. You *have* discovered it, haven't you, Professor?"

"I have made a discovery, Mr. Crellin," he replied, speaking rather more seriously than the circumstances seemed to warrant, "but whether I have found a hitherto unknown comet or not is another matter. What I have done is this. Thanks to that magnificent instrument of yours, I have seen a comet in a part of the heavens where no comet ought to be just now according to the calculations of all the known orbits and periods, but whether it is a new one or a known one which, by one cause or another, has been deflected from its orbit and started off on a new course, is the question of which I spoke just now. That I have not yet been able to decide; but, of course, in any case," he went on with a smile which Miss Auriole thought somewhat lacking in spontaneity, "the discovery will be an important one—very important I fear—that is to say, of course, I expect—and the honour of the Crellin Reflector cannot fail to be duly vindicated."

"And also that of the discoverer," corrected Miss Auriole, "for after all, however good the telescope is, it's only a mechanical sort of eye that it needs a brain to use properly, and if the brain doesn't take care of itself the eye won't be much use, so I want you to promise me just now, Professor, that you are going to lie down the moment breakfast's done and sleep straight on to lunch-time. You know," she added, colouring ever so slightly, "we're having a garden-party this afternoon, and Lord Westerham and his mother are coming, and I was going to ask you to do the honours of the Observatory, if you hadn't anything else very particular to do."

Miss Auriole was looking wonderingly into the eye-piece of the great Reflector.

"I can promise that easily," he replied, looking, as she thought, a trifle earnestly at her out of his tired eyes, "as it is exactly what I was going to do. I shall not have to be at the telescope till nearly eleven to-night so I shall have plenty of time to get a good nap and do what I can in the way of helping to entertain your friends—and—and his lordship, whom, by-the-way, I don't think I've told you before, was rather a chum of mine when we were at Trinity together. Westerham's about as good a specimen of the very falsely styled effete aristocracy of this country as a man would wish to call a friend or—a woman, well, something else."

II.

THE garden-party was both socially and scientifically a great success, and even the young Professor appeared to enjoy it in his usual quiet, grave fashion. The great Reflector was of course the supreme object of interest, though nothing was said about the new comet, which had been discovered swimming in space far outside the confines of all known systems, for that was still a secret; and was to remain so until all calculations had been completed, and Arthur Lennox was able to tell his brother astronomers, all over the world, how they were to point their telescopes, in order to observe the newly arriving stranger from the unknown regions beyond the worlds.

Lennox, as has already been mentioned, had been at Trinity with Lord Westerham, and they had remained good friends since. In fact, it was partly through his lordship's influence as well as his own talents that the young astronomer had got to Greenwich. But even these circumstances hardly seemed to warrant a very direct and intimate question which he put point-blank to him as they were walking together to Ockley station after the party.

"Westerham," he said, suddenly stopping and looking him straight in the eyes, "I am going to ask you a question which you will probably think a very impertinent one; and further, whether you answer it or not, I am going to ask you not to ask me why I ask it. There now, there are a good many 'asks' in that, but I wanted to put it plainly, even at the expense of a little tautology."

Lord Westerham was one of the frankest and most open-minded of men, and he stared in a somewhat puzzled fashion at Lennox as he replied:

"My dear fellow, you are at perfect liberty to ask me what question you like, and if I can I'll answer it without asking any more questions, but look here, old man," he broke off with a sudden change in his voice, "I hope it's nothing well, unpleasant—nothing that's going to bring any trouble upon you for instance—for 'pon my word I never saw even you look quite as serious as you do now. But at any rate whatever it is, out with it; you can't offend me even if you tried."

"You are about the only man, I think, I should find it possible to ask such a question," Lennox replied, speaking hesitatingly and rather awkwardly, "for it's—it's a precious awkward one for any man to ask another. To put it as shortly as I can it is just this: Have you made up your mind to marry Miss Crellin, and if so is the matter irrevocable?"

Lennox, feeling very like a man in the dock who has just heard the fatal "guilty" spoken by the foreman of the jury, waited with a very plainly depicted expression of mingled apology and apprehension on his slightly flushed face. Lord Westerham's eyes and mouth opened together, but it was a smile that opened his mouth, and there were strong symptoms of a laugh in his honest, blue eyes. Then he took a step forward, and his hand fell with a slap on Lennox's shoulder.

"My dear fellow," he said, "why don't you know——"

"Know what?" said Lennox, with something like a gasp. "You're not——"

"No," said his lordship, shaking his head and trying to look serious, "no, I'm not engaged to her. What I was going to say was, don't you know that I have been engaged to my cousin Lilian Northcote ever since she was old enough—well—to understand the difference between being kissed by a girl and by a boy. No, no, you needn't have any fears of me, old man. Not even Miss Auriole's beauty, with all the glitter of the old gentleman's millions as a halo, would tempt me from that allegiance—and then, you know, happily the Westerham coronet doesn't want regilding. But now that I know what your question is I am rather sorry that I promised not to ask why you asked it. Still, I dare say I can give a pretty good guess at it, so I suppose I must be content with that."

"A pretty good guess at it!" said Lennox to himself about half-an-hour later when he was striding back alone. "A pretty good guess! Good God, if he only could, I wonder what he would think! He with all his splendid prospects and, as he believes, a whole long life of happiness in front of him, and thirteen months to-day—yes, almost to this very hour—well, for the present ignorance is bliss.

"And now I wonder what the old gentleman will say. Anyhow, that's one load off my mind, There won't be anything mean about it. He or she or both of them may say 'yes' or 'no,' but after all neither of them will be able to think there is anything dishonourable in it. A world for a girl! It sounds quite romantic. Fancy me as a hero of a romance, and one, too, if it only comes off, that will put Jules Verne and Flammarion somewhat in the shade. Ah, well! sufficient unto the day, etc. I think I'll tackle the old man first. No, I don't think I will. It is the conventional way, of course, but the circumstances are anything but conventional, and if she won't have anything to do with me, well, there's an end of it—and possibly of the world too. Seems a rather selfish way to put it. In fact, some exalted moralists might call it a bit mean but—ah! ten o'clock."

He stopped suddenly as the soft chime of an old church clock came drifting along the valley. He listened to the four chimes and then to the ten slow, clear strokes that tolled out upon the still air of the July evening. At the tenth he started, and a shudder ran through his well-knit, muscular frame. Then, turning his face upwards towards the well-known constellations that were growing brighter in the darkening sky, he began his walk and his reverie again.

"Just fancy! A year and a month from to-day that very clock may be sounding the death-knell of the human race, striking the hour of Doom in fact, and forty-six minutes and thirty-eight seconds later—Phew! it isn't a pleasant thing even for the callously-scientific mind to contemplate. It seems almost wrong to tell her anything about it, but—rubbish! what an ass I am! It's got to be known, and as soon as the Lick and the Yerkes people get on to it it won't take them very long to work out the orbit and period, and wouldn't they just score nicely over the discover of the Crellin comet. No, I shall tell her myself; and I may as well tell her to-night as any other time. It's rather lucky I made that promise to show it to her to-night for the first time. I couldn't have a better opportunity."

The result of this resolution was that a little after half-past eleven Miss Auriole was looking wonderingly into the eye-piece of the great Reflector, watching a tiny little patch of mist, somewhat brighter towards one end than the other, like a little wisp of white smoke rising from a very faint spark, that was apparently floating across an unfathomable sea of darkness. She seemed to see this darkness through and behind a swarm of stars of all sizes and colours. They appeared very much more wonderful and glorious and important than the little spray of white smoke, because she hadn't yet the faintest conception of its true import to her and every other human being on earth: but she was very soon to know now.

While she was watching it in breathless silence, in which the clicking of the mechanism which kept the great telescope moving so as to exactly counteract the motion of the machinery of the universe sounded like the blows of a sledge-hammer on an anvil, Arthur Lennox stood beside her, wondering should he begin to tell her, and what he should say. At last she turned away from the eye-piece, and looked up at him with something like a scared expression in her pretty eyes and said:

"It's very wonderful, isn't it, that one should be able to see all that just by looking into a little bit of a hole like that—and you tell me all those great big bright stars around your comet are so far away, that if you look at them in the ordinary way you don't even see them—and there they look almost as if you could put out your hand and touch them. It's very wonderful, isn't it—and just a little bit awful, too!" she added, with a little shiver.

"Yes," he said, speaking slowly and even more gravely than she thought the subject warranted. "Yes, it is both wonderful and, in a way, awful. Do you know that some of those stars you have seen in there are so far away that the light that you see them by may have left them when Solomon was king in Jerusalem? They may be quite dead and dark now, or reduced into fire-mist by collision with some other star. And then, perhaps, there are others behind them again so far away that their light has not even reached us yet; and it may never do while there are human eyes on earth to see it."

"Yes, I know," she said, smiling. "You don't forget that I have been to college—and light travels about 186,000 miles a second, doesn't it? But come, Professor, aren't you what they call stretching the probabilities a little when you say that the light of some of them will never get here as far as we're concerned. I always thought that we had a few million years of life to look forward to before this old world of ours gets worn out?"

"There are other ends possible for this world besides wearing out, Miss Auriole!" he answered, this time almost solemnly. "Other worlds have, as I say, been reduced to fire-mist. Some have been shattered to tiny fragments to make asteroids and meteorites—stars and worlds in comparison with which this bit of a planet of ours is nothing more than a speck of sand, a mere atom of matter drifting over the wilderness of immensity. In fact such a trifle is it in the organisation of the Universe that if some celestial body collided with it—say a comet with a sufficiently solid nucleus—and the heat developed by the impact turned it into a mass of blazing gas, an astronomer on Neptune, one of our own planets, wouldn't even notice the accident, unless he happened to be watching the earth through a powerful telescope at the time."

"And is such an accident—as you call it—possible, Professor?" she asked, jumping womanlike by a sort of unconscious intuition to the very point to which he was so clumsily trying to lead up. "I thought you spoke rather queerly about this comet of yours at breakfast this morning. I hope there isn't any chance of its getting on to the same track as this terrestrial locomotive of ours. That would be just awful, wouldn't it?—why, what's the matter, Professor? You are going to be real ill, I know. You had better get down to the house and go to bed. It's want of sleep, isn't it? You'll be driving yourself mad that way. Come to the couch and lie down for a moment. You look as if you are going to fall. Shall I call Mr. Sandheim?"

A sudden and terrible change had come over him while she was speaking. It was only for the moment, and yet to him it was an eternity. It might, as she said, have been the want of sleep, for insomnia plays strange tricks sometimes with the strongest of intellects, or, more probably, it might have been that and the horror of his secret working on the great love that he had for this girl, who was sitting there alone with him in the silence of that dim room and in the midst of the glories and the mysteries of the universe.

His eyes had grown fixed and staring and looked sightlessly at her, and his face shone ghastly pale in the dim light of the solitary shaded lamp. Certainly, one of those mysterious crises which are among the unsolved secrets of psychology had come upon him like some swift access of delirium.

He no longer saw her sitting there by the telescope, calm, gracious and beautiful. He saw her as, by his pitiless calculations, he must do it at time thirteen months to come—with her soft, grey eyes starting, horror-driven, from their orbits, staring blank and wide and hideous at the overwhelming Hell that would be falling down from Heaven upon the devoted earth. He saw her fresh young face withered and horror-lined and old, and the bright brown hair grown grey with the years that would pass in those few final moments. He saw the sweet red lips that had tempted him so often to wild thoughts, parched and black, wide open and gasping vainly for the breath of life in the hot, burnt-out atmosphere.

It was only a glimpse, and with that the strange trance-vision ended.

Then he saw—no, it was only a glimpse, and with that the strange trance-vision ended. What must have come after that would in all certainty have driven him mad, there and then, before his work had even begun, but at that moment, swiftly severing the darkness that was falling over his soul, there came to him an idea, bright, luminous and lovely as an inspiration from Heaven itself, and with it came back the calm sanity of the sternly disciplined intellect, prepared to contemplate not only the destruction of the world he lived in, but even the eternal loss of the woman he loved—the only human being who could make that world beautiful or even tolerable.

The vision was blotted out from the sight of his soul, the darkness cleared away from his eyes, and he saw her again as she still was. It had all passed in a few moments, and yet in them he had been down into Hell, and he had come back to earth and her presence.

Almost by the time she had uttered her last word, he had regained command of his voice, and he began clearly and quietly to answer the question which was still echoing through the chambers of his brain.

"It was only a little passing faintness, thank you, and something else which you will understand when I have done, if you have patience to hear me to the end," he said, looking straight at her for a moment, and then beginning to walk slowly up and down the room past her chair. "I am going to surprise you, perhaps to frighten you, and very probably to offend you deeply," he began again in a quiet, dry sort of tone, which somehow impressed her against all her convictions that he didn't much care whether or not he did any, or all of these things; but there was something else in his tone and manner which held her to her seat silent and attentive, although she was conscious of the distinct desire to get up and run away.

"Your guess about the comet, or whatever it may prove to be, is quite correct. I don't think it is a new one. From what I have seen of it so far I have every reason to believe that it is Gambart's comet, which was discovered in 1826 and became visible to the naked eye in the autumn of 1833. It then crossed the orbit of the earth one month after the earth had passed the point of intersection. After that some force divided it in two and in '46 and '52 it re-appeared as two twin comets constantly separating. Now it would seem that the two masses have come together again, and, as they are both larger in bulk and greater in density, it would appear that, somewhere in the distant fields of space, they have united with some other and denser body, and the result is, that what is practically a new comet, with a much denser nucleus than any hitherto seen, is approaching our system, and, unless a miracle happens, or there is a practically impossible error in my calculations, it will cross the orbit of the earth thirteen months from to-day precisely at the moment that the earth itself arrives at the point of intersection."

So far Auriole had listened to the precise scientific phraseology with more interest than alarm, but now she took advantage of a little pause and said:

"And the consequences, Professor?—I mean the consequences to us as living beings—you may as well tell me everything now that you've gone so far."

"I am going to," he said, stopping for a moment in his walk. "And I am going to tell you something more than that. Granted that what I have said happens, one of two things must follow. If the nucleus of the comet is solid enough to pass through our atmosphere without being dissipated, it will strike the surface with so much force, that both it and the earth will probably be transformed into fiery vapour by the conversion of the motion of the two bodies into heat. If not, its contact with the oxygen of the earth's atmosphere will produce an aerial conflagration which, if it does not roast alive every living thing on earth, will convert the oxygen by combustion into some irrespirable and poisonous gas and so kill us by a slower, but no less fatal process."

"Horrible!" she said, shivering this time. "You sound like a judge pronouncing sentence of death on the whole human race. I suppose there is no possibility of reprieve. Well, go on, Professor, is there anything else?"

"Yes," he said, "there is something else. Those are the scientific facts as far as they go. I am going to tell you the chances now, and something beside. There is just one chance—one possible way of averting universal ruin from the earth, and substituting for it nothing more serious than an unparalleled display of celestial fireworks. All that will be necessary is perfect calculation and unstinted expenditure of money."

"Well," she said, "can't you do the calculations, Professor, and hasn't Dad got millions enough? How could he spend them better than saving the whole human race from being burnt alive? There isn't anything else, is there?"

"There *was* something else," he said, stopping in front of her again. She had risen to her feet as she said the last words, and the two stood facing each other in the dim light, while the mechanism of the telescope kept on clicking away in its heedless mechanical fashion, and kept the aperture of the great instrument constantly in such a position that the image of the comet still hovered unseen in the mirror of the Reflector.

"Yes, there was something else, and I may as well tell you after all, for even if you never see or speak to me again, it won't stop the work being done now. I could have kept this discovery to myself till it would have been too late to do anything, for no other telescope without my help would even find the comet for four months to come, and even now there is hardly a day to be lost if the work is to be done in time, and then, well, I suppose I must have gone mad for the time being for I thought—you will hardly believe me, I suppose—that I could make you the price of the world's safety.

"From that you will see how much I love you, however mad I may have been. Losing you, I would have lost the world with you. If my love lives, I thought, the world shall live; if not, the world shall die. But, just now, when you thought I was taken ill, I had a sort of vision and I saw you—yes, you, Miss Auriole, as, if my one chance fails, you must infallibly be this night thirteen months hence. I didn't see any of the other millions who would be choking and gasping for breath, and writhing in the torture of the universal fire—I only saw you, and my own baseness in thinking even for a moment that such a bargain would be possible. That is all."

She had not interrupted him even by a gesture, but as she listened a thousand signs and trifles which alone had meant nothing to her, now seemed to come together and make one clear and definite revelation. His plainly, almost brutally, spoken words had done the rest. This strong, reserved, silent man had all the time loved her so desperately that he was going mad about her—so mad that, as he had said, he had even dreamed of weighing the possession of her single insignificant self against the safety of the whole world, with all its innumerable millions of people—mostly as good in their way as she was.

Well, it might be that the love of such a man was a thing worthy to weigh even against a comet—not in her eyes, for there was no question of that now, but in her father's. But that was a matter for future consideration. She drew herself up a little stiffly and said in just such a tone as she might have used if what he had just been saying had had no personal interest for her, had, in fact, been about some other girl.

"I think it's about time to be going down to the house, Professor, isn't it? I am quite sure a night's rest won't do you any harm. No, I'm not offended,

and I don't think I'm even frightened yet. It somehow seems too big and too awful a thing to be only frightened at. Too much like the Day of Judgment, you know. I am glad you've told me—yes, everything—and I'm glad that what you call your madness is over. You will be able to do your work in saving the world all the better, only don't tell dad anything except—well—just the scientific and necessary part of it. You know, saving a world is a very much bigger business than winning a woman—at least it is in one particular woman's eyes—and I've learnt somewhere in mathematics something about the greater sometimes including the less. And now, don't you think we had better be going down into the house? It's getting quite late."

III.

It was about two months later, when Professor Lennox had verified and re-verified every figure in his calculations, and made a good many more besides, that he at last sent the news of his discovery to the principal observatories of the world, coupled with the request that his own figures should be checked and any possible errors pointed out.

The results of this ominous communication were instantaneous and terrific. With one accord every powerful telescope in the world was turned upon that portion of the distant fields of Space out of which the strange and terrible visitant was rushing at a speed of thousands of miles an hour to that awful trysting-place where it and the planet Terra were to mingle in fiery union. Every astronomer, from California to Greenwich, and from Pike's Peak to Melbourne, set himself to work out the orbit and period of the comet, and a few days later the awful news flashed over the wires of the world: "Lennox figures absolutely correct. Collision with Crellin Comet apparently inevitable. Consequences incalculable."

"I had a sort of vision, and I saw you—yes, you, Miss Auriole."

This was the intelligence which the civilised nations of the earth found in their newspapers on the morning of the first of September. It was followed by digests of the calculations and these again with speculations of various sorts, some solemn and deliberate, others wild, beyond the dreams of phantasy. Those who had for more than a generation made handsome incomes by prophesying the end of the world to occur at about an average of every seven years, gambled with absolute certainty on the shortness of the public memory, revised their figures, and proved to demonstration that this was the very thing they had been foretelling all along.

First there came blank incredulity, then a sort of stupor, which meant that the popular mind was veering round; then panic, wild, universal and uncontrollable. The earth had only another twelvemonth or so to live! The whole human race was doomed to death by fire! What did it matter what anybody did—what *could* anybody do, in fact?

So the planet was in distinct danger of becoming one collossal lunatic asylum, when one morning—it was the fifteenth of September—the *Daily Mail* came out with a double-barrelled interview with Professor Lennox, who was now by far the most famous man in the world, and Mr. Emerson G. Crellin, proprietor of the great Crellin Reflector, and godfather, as it were, of the approaching Destroyer.

It was far and away the most interesting communication that had ever appeared in a newspaper, for it informed the world that the discoverer of the worst peril which had ever threatened the human race and the man whose wealth and devotion to science had made the discovery possible, had all this time been quietly laying their heads together and elaborating a scheme which, as they both confidently asserted, offered the only hope of saving humanity from the impending peril and would most probably achieve that object.

The idea was simply stupendous, and it lost none of its magnificence by the modesty with which the Professor described it to the interviewer.

"There is nothing new about the idea," he said, "except its application to the present circumstances. Of course you have read Jules Verne's "Journey to the Moon." Well, my plan is simply to do the same thing on a much bigger scale, only instead of firing men and dogs and chickens out of my cannon, I am going to fire something like a ton-and-a-half of explosives. The danger is in the contact of the nucleus of the comet with the earth's atmosphere. If that can be prevented there is no further cause for alarm, so—to put the matter quite shortly—my projectile will have an initial velocity of ten miles a second, and therefore a range that is practically infinite for that velocity would, if necessary, carry it beyond the sphere of the earth's attraction.

"Hence, if the gun is properly trained and fired at precisely the right moment, and if the fuse does its work, the projectile will pass into the nucleus of the comet, and before the heat has time to melt the shell, the charge will explode and the nucleus—the only dangerous part—will either be blown to fragments or dissipated in gas. Therefore, instead of what I might be allowed to call a premature Day of Judgment, we shall simply have a magnificent display of celestial fireworks, which will probably amount to nothing more than an unparalleled shower of shooting stars, as they are popularly called. The details of the experiment will be practically the same as those which Jules Verne describes—I mean as regards the making and firing of the cannon, only as we haven't time to get a big enough hole dug, we have bought a colliery in Durham which has a perpendicular shaft nearly a mile deep, and which is happily exactly in the right latitude and longitude. Everything is arranged and we shall begin work at once."

Even the *Daily Mail* interviewer was for a few moments paralysed by the quiet and yet stupendous audacity of the scheme, and when he had got his breath back he turned to Mr. Crellin and said, because just then he could think of nothing else to say:

"And your share in this wonderful work, sir, is I presume——"

"Just finding the dollars, sir; that's all," replied the old gentleman soberly. "If we can put the business through they couldn't be better used, and if we can't I reckon they won't be much use to me or anyone else. Other people can come in if they like, but if not I figure that I can foot the bill myself. It'll be worth the dollars, anyhow, if it's only to show what New World enterprise combined with Old World brains can do in the way of bringing off a real big thing. I guess we'll give the planet Terra a new satellite even if we don't stop the comet, and, if we all have to go to glory through a transformation scene of blue blazes, I for one shall go with the comforting knowledge that I've done something to enrich the Solar System. You see, we can't lose much if the Professor's figures are right, and we do stand in to win something like eternal glory—and that's good enough for me."

The sale of the *Daily Mail* that morning ran far above its own best records, and by noon the news was all over the world, which promptly went mad again but after a different and more cheerful fashion. Every existing copy of the "Journey to the Moon" was bought up within an hour. Camille Flammarion's wonderful story "The End of the World," had already been translated into every civilised language, and was selling by millions, while Mr. H. G. Wells's even more extraordinary "War of the Worlds," although it had no actual bearing on the great subject, was brought up in colossal editions with almost equal avidity.

The moment that the Professor's project was made public, money began to flow in from all parts of the world. The iron and steel industries of the north of England were practically bought up for the time being, whole armies of workmen toiled night and day in relays at the preliminary work of making the great cannon. America, not to be behind in the good work of saving the world from its approaching peril, set to work to build an even bigger weapon, with which to bombard the still invisible assailant of the earth.

International jealousies and hatred vanished all the world over, mankind became united in the confronting of the common and the universal menace, and nothing that hands or brains could do to make the great experiment a triumphant success was left undone.

At length, on the first of July, the long and feverishly awaited word went forth. If the sky on the night of the fourth was clear of clouds, the Crellin Comet, as it was now universally called, would become visible to the naked eye at forty-six minutes and thirty-eight seconds past ten—that is to say, precisely four weeks before the moment at which its nucleus would come into collision with the earth, provided always that the Professor's projectile failed to do its work.

Of course it had been for some months within range of the tens of thousands of telescopes which had been directed towards it. Photographs of it had been published broadcast over the world, and practically every civilised, and a great many uncivilised, human beings were familiar with its appearance, but this did not diminish the universal interest in the announcement.

While it could only be seen through telescopes or in photographs there was still a sort of air of unreality about it. It might be coming, but it was still very far away. None but savages now doubted that it was really coming; but civilised humanity as a mass wanted something more than this, and this was supplied on that momentous night when, as the world rolled round, bringing each meridian of longitude within view of that one spot in the skies, millions after millions of eyes were turned upwards and saw the stars shining through a pale mist of yellow light spread out in two vast wings, between which there was a speck of deeper and yellower light.

It was very far away still, but there it was. There could be no doubt now, even in the minds of the most ignorant. Months and months before the astronomers had prophesied its appearance, and there it was! Henceforth there were but three points of interest for the human race; one, by night, was the comet, the others by day were the Hetton Colliery in Durham and the Pittsburg Works.

So the last few remaining days and nights passed. Every night the threatening Shape in the heavens grew clearer and bigger and brighter, and every day the newspapers published the most minute details of the progress of the mighty weapon upon which the hopes of humanity, so far as this world was concerned, now rested.

Soon the nucleus of the comet became visible in broad daylight, then the two wings came into view morning and evening, making it look like some colossal bird of prey swooping down from its eerie, somewhere in the heights of space, upon the trembling and terrified world. The professional prophets naturally said with the assurance of absolute conviction that it was nothing less awful than the Destroying Angel *in propria persona*.

At length, when excitement had passed into frenzy, and frenzy into an almost universal delirium, two cablegrams crossed each other under the Atlantic. One was to say that the Pittsburg gun was ready; the other that the loading of the Lennox gun would commence the following morning. This was just a week before the fatal night, and when the sun set on the evening of the fourth of August, and when many millions had looked upon it, as they thought for the last time, the Professor set all the wires of the world thrilling with the news that the operation of loading had been carried out with complete success, that the huge projectile with its thirty hundredweight of picrite—a newly discovered explosive some twenty times more powerful than nitro-glycerine—was resting quietly in its place in the potential volcano, which at the touch of a woman's hand was to hurl it through space and into the heart of the swiftly advancing enemy of humanity.

At forty-six minutes past ten exactly the cannon would be fired. Ten seconds later the projectile would strike the nucleus of the comet at a point just one hundred miles above the muzzle of the gun, and the eleventh second would see the fate of the world decided. The mouth of the pit-shaft, which was now the case, as it were, of the collossal weapon which was about to do battle for humanity, lay almost in the middle of a wide oval valley surrounded by ranges of hills. No living thing was permitted to come within five miles of the huge ring of metal out of which that terrific charge was soon to be vomited.

Two electric wires led from the ring over separate rows of poles to the top of a hill five miles away, and ended in two instruments standing side by side on a table. On the same table there were also two chronometers beating time together to the thousandth part of a second.

On all the hills and scattered over the country for miles around was the greatest concourse of human beings that had ever been gathered together on one portion of the earth's surface.

It was numbered by millions, and included nearly every nationality under the sun, and, as the supreme moment drew near, every voice was hushed, and as every eye turned upwards to where the shape of the comet, now vast, menacing and awful, over-spanned the sky, every heart seemed to beat in unison, as though counting off what might be the last seconds of human life on earth.

Grouped about the table on which stood the two instruments was gathered a concourse of people amongst whom were nearly all the greatest and most celebrated

men and women in the world. But rank and honours were already things of the past. In the presence of that appalling menace which flamed across the heavens all men and women were equal, since within the next few seconds all might be reduced at the same instant to the same dust and ashes.

The ghastly orange-green glare which had now completely obliterated the moonlight shone down alike on the upturned face of monarch and peasant, the good and the bad, the noble and the base, and tinged them all with its own sickly and hideous hue.

There was only one distinction left among all the hosts of men; only one man stood higher than anyone else, and this was he upon whom the hopes of the people rested.

He stood on one side of the table facing one of the instruments, and opposite to him at the other stood the woman to whom he had first confided the terrible secret of the world's approaching end.

He had honestly kept the unspoken pact that had been made thirteen months before in the observatory on Leith Hill. Neither word nor look of love had, to her knowledge, passed his lips or lighted his eyes, and even now as he stood opposite to her, scanning her upturned face by that awful light, his eyes were as steady and impassive as they had ever been at the eye-pieces of his instruments.

Auriole had a fore-finger already resting on a little white button ready to send the kindling spark into the mighty mass of explosives which lay buried nearly a mile down at the bottom of the giant tube.

Lennox, too, had his finger on the button in front of him, but his left hand was in his coat pocket and his left fore-finger was on the trigger of a loaded and cocked revolver.

Auriole knew nothing of this. She only remembered that a few minutes before—it seemed like several weeks ago already—he had promised that, if the worst happened, she at least should be spared the universal agony.

Lord and Lady Westerham were standing close by the table, and his lordship also had a revolver in his pocket.

The chronometers ticked off the seconds, each one seeming more like eternity than the one before it. The comet grew bigger and bigger, and its flaming nucleus blazed out brighter and brighter. A vague, low, wailing sound seemed to be running round the circle of the hills. It was the first utterance of the unendurable agony of the multitudes.

At last Lennox looked up from his chronometer at Auriole, and said in a quiet dry voice:

"Ten seconds!"

Then he began to count: "Nine—eight—seven—six—five—four—three—two—NOW!"

Their two fingers went down at the same instant and completed the circuits. The next the central fires of the earth seemed to burst loose. Such a roar as had never deafened human ears before shook earth and air with a concussion that seemed like the loosening of the foundations of the world, and a mighty column of pale flame sprang up to the zenith over which the nucleus of the comet was now exactly impending.

Then came ten more seconds of mute and agonised suspense, and then, such a sight as no other human eyes will ever see, saving only those which, in the fulness of time, may look upon the awful pageantry of the Last Day.

High up in the air there was a shrill screaming sound following the roar of the great gun. Something like a white flash of light streamed upwards straight at the heart of the descending destroyer.

Something like a white flash of light streamed upwards.

Then the whole heavens were illumined by a blinding glare of unearthly light. The nucleus of the comet seemed to fling out long rays of many coloured light, and then, like some vast globe of electric fluid, it burst into myriads of atoms.

The watching millions on earth instinctively clasped their hands to their ears expecting such a sound as would deafen them for ever, but none came for the explosion had taken place beyond the limits of the earth's atmosphere. The whole sky was now filled from zenith to horizon with a pale, golden, luminous mist, and through this the moon and stars began to shine dimly.

Then a blast of burning air swept shrieking and howling across the earth, for now the planet Terra was rushing at her headlong speed of nearly seventy thousand miles an hour through the ocean of fire-mist into which the shattered comet had been dissolved. Then this passed, the cool wind of night followed it, and the moon and stars shone down once more undimmed through the pure and cloudless ether.

So far there had been silence, but now there rose from earth to heaven such a burst of triumphant thanksgiving as had never welled up from human hearts through human lips before.

A north country miner with a mighty baritone voice had somewhere started the Old Hundredth Psalm, and away it went, rolling through the now still night over hill and vale, echoing from village to village, and from town to town, until the whole United Kingdom was with one voice giving thanks for the Great Deliverance.

But the man who, under Providence, had wrought it heard nothing of this. He only felt a soft, trembling clasp closing round his right hand, and he only heard Auriole's voice whispering a single word—and that word was his own name.

The next moment a stronger grip pulled his left hand out of his coat pocket—bringing the revolver with it, and the somewhat hard, practical voice of Emerson G. Crellin, for the first and only time shaken by emotion in public, said:

"We may thank God and you, Professor, that there is still a world here with living men and women on it—and there's one woman who's going to live henceforth for you and no one else. She told me all about it last night. You've won her fair and square, and you're going to have her. I did have other views for her; but I've changed my mind—and anyhow you're the biggest man on earth just now."

Before daybreak the next morning there was put into the Professor's hand a cablegram from Pittsburg, worded as follows:

"Lennox, England:

"Well aimed! As you left no pieces for us to shoot at we have sent our projectile to take its chance in Space. No use for it here. Hope it will hit and stop next comet of same sort coming this way. America thanks you. Any terms you like for lectures."

Arthur Lennox so far accepted the invitation as to spend his honeymoon in a triumphal progress through the States and Canada, but not even the Crellin Reflector has been able to discover anything of the whereabouts of the famous Pittsburg Projectile. Probably it is still speeding on its lonely way through the silent fields of Space—for it left the earth endowed with the enormous initial velocity of fifteen miles a second—and it is within the limits of possibility that, at some happy moment in the future, and somewhere far away beyond the ken of human vision, its gigantic charge of explosives may do for some other threatened world what the Lennox Projectile did for this one when it shattered the nucleus of the now happily vanished Great Crellin Comet.

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By Osmond Shillingford.

PAVIO OF ODA took the victor's prize at King Vinquenna's great tourney of Segostro, and the prize was the King's daughter. In fourteen days Prince Pavio was to wed.

One morning, returning from the chase, he stopped his horse outside the shop of Guiccinni, the cunning artificer of metals. Dismounting, he entered. Guiccinni was at work among his three apprentices—Lurbin, the clever workman, very dear to him, dark and fragile, of white teeth and bright, brown eyes; Leonardo, handsome and fair, a bad smith, but a brave man; and Pancha, a boy, and somewhat of a churl.

Seeing the Prince, Guiccinni bowed low, and said:

"Your Highness honours me too much."

"I honour you, Guiccinni, but not too much. I come to-day to set you a task worthy of your great skill."

"All work for you, sire, deserves better than my best."

"Let this rare thing have its deserts. You know, Guiccinni, I am to wed. I would have a wine cup to pledge my bride upon our wedding night. This cup I will bequeath to my son, and he to his. It shall not touch lips, save when a king drinks to his true love. Make it, Guiccinni. Use all your art; it should be a beauteous cup to hold so sweet a draught."

"So very sweet a draught," murmured a voice.

All turned and saw Gertrude Guiccinni, the fair daughter of the smith, standing in the shadow.

"And why so sweet a draught, my fair eavesdropper?" said the Prince, smiling.

"Only the fortunate find a true love, only the most fortunate may pledge her," said the girl.

"You speak dolorously. Have you no true love?"

"Yes, sire."

"And will you not pledge him?"

"As his bride? Ah! I know not——"

"A maiden in distress. Guiccinni, this must be looked to. We must find this true love."

"He is not far to seek, my Prince."

"He is here?"

"He is here."

"In this room?"

"In this room."

"The scent is warm, Guiccinni. May I join the chase, sweet maid?"

"Ah! no, sire."

Turning to the three apprentices, Pavio said, laughing: "There is one of you outshines your Prince. But which? How shall we discover him, Guiccinni, eh?"

There was silence as the Prince looked round the room. Guiccinni stood with an embarrassed frown upon his face, Leonardo with his lips parted and his chest rising high, Pancha with a foolish downward glance, and Lurbin very pale.

"How shall we find him?" repeated the Prince, enjoying the scene.

"Ah! I have it. We will put him to the ordeal. He shall prove himself if not a stout knight then a good smith. Who gives the fairest design for my love cup shall win the maid. How like you the scheme, Guiccinni?"

"I like it very well," said the smith, smiling in relief. "There is one among them I would choose before all men to be my son."

"Good," replied Pavio; "and you, my maid, what say you?"

"If he whom I love win, sire, I am content."

"But if he fail?"

"If he love me he will not fail."

"Well spoken; and you," turning to the group of young men, "what say you?"

Leonardo, with his eyes upon the girl, heard not the Prince; Pancha, with his gaze to the ground, would not reply; but Lurbin made answer:

"It is not fit to make a maid a prize."

"Sirrah! your queen was one."

"Yes, sire; but she loved the victor."

"Recreant, you shrink from the ordeal."

"I shrink not, sire; but if I win and love her not, it were ill to make her bride."

"Love not so fair a maid! Out on you."

"Then, my Prince," said Lurbin slowly, "if she love not me?"

"Fie, man, win and see. Women love the victors. I will not be gainsaid. Seven days from now in the Market Place I will award the prize—two hundred crowns. Guiccinni, your daughter shall wed the same morn as my queen. It is a mark of my especial favour."

So saying, Prince Pavio strode from the room, mounted his horse, and rode away with his cavalcade. There was silence in the room when he had gone. The young men stood like simpletons, and the girl had sunk upon a seat with her face hidden in her hands. Guiccinni spoke. "You have heard the Prince. Let this cup be worthy of the house of Guiccinni. I have ever loved a good workman, for the best among you my daughter's love will go with mine. About your task speedily."

The young men were going. "Stay you, Lurbin," cried the old man, "I would speak with you." Leonardo and Pancha went out.

"Gertrude," said Guiccinni, going over to the girl and laying his hand upon her hair. She looked up. There were tears in her eyes.

"You are not angry with me, father?" said she.

"Angry!" said he lovingly.

"For that I would leave you. Mother was forced and I choose to go. God drew her and my love draws me. You will be very lonely then. Forgive me."

"Dear child," said he, "the old die and the young love. It all must be." He kissed her. "And now leave me, I have business with Lurbin." The girl went out slowly.

"Lurbin," said Guiccinni, when the door closed, "this freak of the Prince goes most happily with my desire. If I had thought on my daughter wedding, I could not wish her better mated than with you."

"But, sir," faltered Lurbin, "I may not win."

"Not win! Why, there is no workman in the city can vie with you; and forget not I gave you your cunning, boy."

"You and God, sir."

"Aye, you say well God and I. And God gave me my daughter, and I give her to you. Which is the better gift, boy?"

"Though it be blasphemy to say so, yours, sir, yours."

"Aye, a loving woman is better than great skill. I know it well. I can bring quaint shapes to golden vases. I cannot bring a smile to her sweet face. I take great praise from many nobles. I would rather have one kiss from her who lies long dead."

"She lives, sir, in your heart."

"Memories! Memories! Sweet memories are bitter things."

"I wonder will sad memories make me glad?"

"You grow too grave, lad. Work and love. Touch life ere it fleets by you."

"Is that life, sir, to work and to love?"

"Yes, Lurbin, stretch forth your hand and grasp it."

"I will take of it, sir, what I may."

"Well, then, about the cup," and Lurbin went out.

Two days passed, and on the third evening, when the work was done and the shop shut, Lurbin was sitting in the garden under the shadow of the tree, and Leonardo came and sat beside him. Now these two were friends.

"Well," said Leonardo, "how goes your design forward?"

"Very well," made answer Lurbin. "It will be a fair thing."

Leonardo's mouth twitched.

"And you," said Lurbin, "how do you?"

"Oh! most basely," broke out Leonardo. "My work is always mean, and this is vile, and I love her so, Lurbin, I love her so."

"Aye," said Lurbin, "I know."

"I thought that that would give me skill; that when my judgment faltered, Love would guide my hand. He stands aloof and mocks. I cannot work for thought of her. My drawing's like a baby's sport. I shall lose her, Lurbin, I shall lose her," he wildly cried.

"Peace!" whispered Lurbin, "she is here."

Leonardo saw her among the flowers. He rose to go to her, and she welcomed him with a smile and a swift glance. Lurbin saw the glance, and struck his clenched hand against his side.

"See!" said Gertrude, "let me have that rose."

"Take the two," said Leonardo, "they grow upon one stalk."

"Two is one too much."

"Then take the one," said he, throwing a rose at her feet.

Before she was aware she trampled it.

"Poor rose!" she cried.

"Happy rose!" said he, fastening the other at her waist. And she smiled, and the sun shone; but Lurbin sat under the shadow of the tree.

"Holy saints!" cried Leonardo, "I had forgot the Cardinal's candlesticks. I must take them to him to-night. I must go." He cast a look round the garden. Lurbin, with his eyes cast down, was plucking a bud to shreds.

"Good-night, sweet love," whispered Leonardo, and took Gertrude's hand.

"Dear love, good-night."

He kissed her fingers and went quickly into the house.

"Lurbin," said Gertrude, sitting beside him, "were you and Leonardo quarrelling when I came?"

"No," said he.

"Speak the truth."

"We were not quarrelling."

"I am glad. I feared this—this love cup would make you foes. Don't let it, Lurbin."

"Leonardo is my very good friend."

"Yes, he loves you; and you love him too?"

"Yes. I shall be lonely when he leaves me."

"Will he leave you?"

Lurbin looked at her and made no answer.

"For," he went on, "he is part of the day and the day's happiness. I like to walk with him."

"Yes," said she.

"To talk with him," Lurbin continued.

"Yes."

"To help him with his work."

"Ah!" she cried, "that could I not do."

"Ah!" said Lurbin. "You have confessed."

"Confessed?"

"Aye. You love him. You love him," he said, very pale and his voice very low.

"Yes," she said, and drooped a little. "I love him."

"Ah!" said Lurbin, and leant back and looked at the sky.

"I have loved him so long. It seems longer than I can remember, Lurbin. When I was a little child I thought when I was twenty the world would change, a miracle would happen. I thought the spring would come earlier, the sun shine more brightly, the flowers put forth fairer blossoms, and I thought that I should understand all the things the winds are saying in whispers that we cannot hear. But I crossed into that year. The spring came and nothing changed. At last, in the summer, came Leonardo, and the summer never has departed. Lurbin, the miracle has happened. I hear and understand."

Lurbin was looking at the sky.

"And now this ordeal," the girl went on; "I may lose him. He may fail."

"Aye," said Lurbin, "he may."

"And I have waited for him so long, so long. Surely God would not bring my love to me to take him so soon away."

"God," said Lurbin, still looking at the sky, "does strange things."

"Does he not, Lurbin?" said the girl. "I do not understand why people are not all made happy. I asked the father," she said in a whisper.

"And what said he?"

"He said God made the earth sad that we might think on Heaven."

"Then God fails," said Lurbin, taking his eyes from the sky and looking in her face, "for glad or sad we think on earth still."

"But that is wicked," said she, "and, Lurbin, my love has made me wicked. I know it, for I have prayed, and God has not heard my prayer."

"What did you pray?"

"That he would help Leonardo to win the love cup. I prayed that a vision might come to him, at night perhaps, of a cup carved by the angels, and he would rise and draw it. But it has not come, it has not come. I question him every morn if he has seen it in his dreams, and he always answers nay, and to-morrow is the fourth day."

"It may come yet," said Lurbin.

"But I am wearying of prayer. It seems so vain. Ah! Lurbin, why does he not hear me? Why does he not hear me?" And she broke into weeping and hid her face upon his shoulder.

His hand went out towards her, but he put it back again.

"Weep not," said he, "he will hear you."

"Give me my love, give me my love," she cried.

"Ah!" said Lurbin, with a sound like a sob, the girl upon his breast, his hands clenched by his side.

"Others have riches, greatness, skill, I have nothing but this. Give me my love."

"Listen, Gertrude," said he, taking her wrists. She looked up at him through her tears. His face was set and his eyes radiant. "God will grant your prayer."

"Lurbin!" she cried, "how know you?"

"God spoke to me," he said, very slowly. "But see, it is growing dark, the dew is falling; let us go in—and on the morrow Leonardo will have seen his vision."

"Dear Lurbin," she said, "you say this to comfort me," and they walked towards the house. "I am not greedy, Lurbin, am I? All this great world so full of beauty and riches I would let slip by me and only keep my love."

"You do not ask for earth; but demand Heaven."

"Is it then so much?" said she in the doorway.

"It is all," said he, and they went into the house.

The next morning Leonardo took Lurbin aside and said to him: "Lurbin! Lurbin! a miracle!"

"A miracle!"

"Listen. I told you I could not design the cup. But Gertrude, who loves me, prayed the saints that an angel might give me a vision. The blessed saints did more. They sent an angel down to draw the cup."

"An angel," said Lurbin, with a smile.

"Aye, last night I put away my paper, blank as ever, in the cupboard over against my bed, locked it and slept. This morning it had a glorious design put upon it in my sleep; it is not yet complete. I carried it to Gertrude, she fell upon her knees, and cried: 'It is the answer to my prayer!' It exceeds belief. Heard you aught? You sleep in the same room. Saw you aught?"

"Nay, naught."

"Most wonderful," said Leonardo. "God is very kind to true lovers, Lurbin, is he not?"

"Yes," said Lurbin, "God is very kind."

The seventh day drew near and every morn Leonardo whispered to Lurbin: "It grows. It grows apace," and Gertrude went singing all the day.

The sixth night Leonardo had a dream that the archfiend stood in his bedroom, broke open his cupboard, tore his drawing across with his black talons, and flung the pieces in his face. He awoke in terror. Clouds hid the moon and the room was dark. He muttered a trembling prayer. His drawing! His drawing! If the Devil had torn it. He would look to it. He felt for the key. It was not there. "Ah!" said he, his fear growing. He crossed to the cupboard. The key was in the lock. "I left it not here," he muttered. With a shaking hand he opened the door and groped for the paper. In vain. "Mother of God," he cried, "'tis gone! Lurbin!" cried he, crossing to the bed to waken him. "Lurbin!" The bed was empty. "Lurbin not here," said he, in a dazed way, for now he knew not what to do. "Why is Lurbin—Oh!" he cried and shuddered. "My friend! My friend would rob me of my love. He destroys my design. I must find him. Wait," he cried, "I come," and taking a dagger he crept warily from the room. There was a little thread of light lying across the floor. He went stealthily towards it. It came from the door of the shop. Pausing with his hand upon the wall, he listened. From within came a scratching sound. Pushing very gently the door, he gave space to put his head within the room. There sat Lurbin with his back towards him, the angel-drawing in his lap. Leonardo crept inside and unsheathed the dagger. His breathing came so thick and loud, he marvelled the other heard him not. Lurbin held a pencil and was drawing on the paper. The sacrilegious wretch, thought Leonardo, he would deface an angel's work; but still he did not strike. Then Lurbin raised the pencil from the drawing. "It is finished," he cried, looking at the cup, and burst into tears.

Leonardo laid his hand on Lurbin's shoulder and spoke:

"Lurbin!" he said, and the word came grating so that he knew not his own voice. "Lurbin, what do you here?"

Lurbin turned with a cry, and saw Leonardo standing with the dagger drawn.

"Leonardo!" he said, like a frightened child.

"Aye, Leonardo," repeated the other, with a cruel face.

"Leonardo," said Lurbin again, bewildered, and swept the tears from his face, for he was shamed that Leonardo should find him weeping—he, a man, "why do you come?"

"To kill you. Give me the drawing."

Lurbin gave it him, still sitting on the seat and looking up at him. He took it and started. "Why," he cried, "it has no hurt, and the figures are complete. What—Oh! I understand," and he let the dagger fall.

Leonardo laid his hand on Lurbin's shoulder.

"Forgive me," he said, in a low, tense tone.

"Leonardo!" said Lurbin, with a wonderful smile, stretching out his hands. "Leonardo, my good friend."

Leonardo stood stock still, with his head bowed.

"Take my hands," said Lurbin.

"Nay," said the other, with a groan, turning away his head.

"Take my hands," repeated Lurbin, rising to his feet.

Leonardo turned and looked at him, and then put forth his hands.

"You win then," said he. "You win in spite of Gertrude's prayer. The cup is yours."

"Nay," said Lurbin gravely; "the cup is yours."

"Not mine, not mine," cried Leonardo; "I am not so base as that."

"The cup is yours. Listen," he said, as Leonardo broke from him. "She loves you, she loves me not. Would you in an angry whim give her to me and misery? For Gertrude's sake, accept my gift."

"Lurbin! Lurbin!" was all that Leonardo found to say.

"Thanks, thanks," said Lurbin, and his face looked strange in the light of the dawn. "Ah! 'tis morning now. I am weary; I will go sleep."

"Sweet be your dreams."

"Nay, no dreams," said Lurbin, smiling, "no dreams but deep forgetfulness," and they two went up together.

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The seventh day rose bright and fair. The Prince was seated in the Market Place, and by his side was the Princess Vinquenna. All Oda had heard the story, and was come to hail the victor.

"Approach," cried Pavio, and Pancha, the youngest, made a deep obeisance to the Princess, and upon one knee handed his drawing to the Prince. The people were still. The rustling of the paper was heard by all.

"'Tis well," said the Prince, looking it over. "For so young a man you have done bravely."

Pancha rose and stepped back with a scowl upon his brow.

"Approach!" said Pavio.

'Twas Lurbin who appeared. Through the crowd ran the murmur: "Lurbin! Lurbin wins without doubt. A great workman."

The paper was unrolled and all were still.

"Good. Excellent!" cried the Prince. "See, my Queen," and he handed it to the Princess. "But say, what do the figures import?"

"The mighty figure in the centre, Sire, imports Love, the lord of all. To him the lover youth offers the spoil of the earth, fruit and flowers, gold and slaves, and Love is stooping to gather up the gifts, for Love takes all."

"Aye," said the Prince, "'tis a greedy God. An excellent device; I doubt if it be overgone."

Lurbin stepped back and his face was calm.

"Approach!" said again the Prince.

"Leonardo!" said the crowd, "Leonardo, a brave youth and a handsome; but no smith."

The paper fluttered.

"Oh!" cried the Prince, in rapture. "Oh! exquisite. Excellent youth, a thing divine."

"Leonardo," cried the crowd, "Leonardo wins!" and they burst into shouts, for he was beloved of all.

"My prince, have I—is the prize mine?"

"Yours! Aye, yours thrice and thrice again."

"Gertrude!" cried Leonardo, and threw out his arms, "I have won! I have won!" A white thing fluttered through the people and fell upon his breast. "I have won!" he said, and kissed her hair before them all.

"Sooth," said Pavio, looking at the paper once more in delight. "it is a kingly cup. But, Leonardo, interpret me the figures."

"Interpret them! My Prince, I cannot," stammered Leonardo.

"Cannot!"

"Sire," broke in Lurbin quickly, "he is not apt at speech. But he told me all their tale. With your good leave I will speak for him."

"'Tis a modest conqueror," muttered Pavio. "Say on, Lurbin."

"The wounded angel to the left is Love; the blood is trickling from his side. On the right is a weary maid athirst in a desert. The lover youth brings the god a cup of water to lave his wound; but, dying he puts it to the maiden's lips, for Love gives all."

"It is a prettier fancy than your own, Lurbin."

"Yes, Sire," said he simply.

"No, no, no," broke out Leonardo. "I cannot. Sire, the two are his."

"What?" cried the Prince.

Then Leonardo threw himself at the Prince's feet, and told the tale, and Gertrude listening swooned, and fell.

"You have deceived your Prince," said Pavio, with a frown at Leonardo.

"Ah no! Sire," said Lurbin, "the fault is mine. She loves him, me she loves not. I should have married her to grief, and given him to despair. Leonardo is my good friend. I intreated him against his will."

"H'm," said the Prince, "look you, Leonardo, you have spoken like an honest fellow. If I give you the maid, how will she fare? You are a vile smith of your own telling. How you will earn bread I know not."

"Oh!" cried the Prince, in rapture. "Oh! exquisite."

"Sire," said he, "I cannot make her rich; but I may make her glad."

"You have found your tongue now, rogue. But I hear you ride a good horse, and wield a stout blade. Would you wield it well for me?"

"Sire," said Leonardo, his face flushed with joy, for his heart was a soldier's, "I will ever keep a loyal heart for you, and a sharp sword for your foes."

"So be it," said the Prince, rising, "of my bodyguard from to-day."

"Lurbin!" called the Princess.

He went and knelt before her.

"Lurbin," she said, "why did you this thing?"

"Leonardo is my good friend."

"Ah!" said she, looking tenderly at him, "this deed was not done for a friend," and she stretched forth her hand. Lurbin kissed it and rose and fell back among the rest.

"Lurbin!" cried the Prince in the saddle. "Bring me the cup in six days. The prize and somewhat else await you."

"It is a yearly grant," whispered Guiccinni.

Lurbin bowed low and the Prince rode off.

And seven days after on the same morn were wed a King and his Queen and a trooper and his maid. And Leonardo became a sergeant of the Prince's bodyguard and fought in great battles and slew many men and dandled a child upon his knee and was glad. But Lurbin wrought gold and silver into beauteous shapes and grew to be a great artist and sat at the table of princes and was very weary.

Mistress Dorothy's Christmas Day.

Squire Ephraim Drew and his good wife Prue
They invited some guests to dine,
And drink to the health of the commonwealth
In a glass of good Christmas wine.

Said Ephraim Drew to his good wife Prue:
"When asking Sir Jonathan Drake
We'll ask the young man, his son Jonathan,
For my daughter Dorothy's sake."

The guests came at last to the Squire's repast,
Receiving a welcome bland,
And Dorothy blushed as Jonathan brushed
With his lips her lily-white hand.

With wondering eyes, at the turkey's size
The guests did exclaim and admire;
There were dainties beside, boiled, baked, stewed and fried,
And a big plum-pudding on fire.

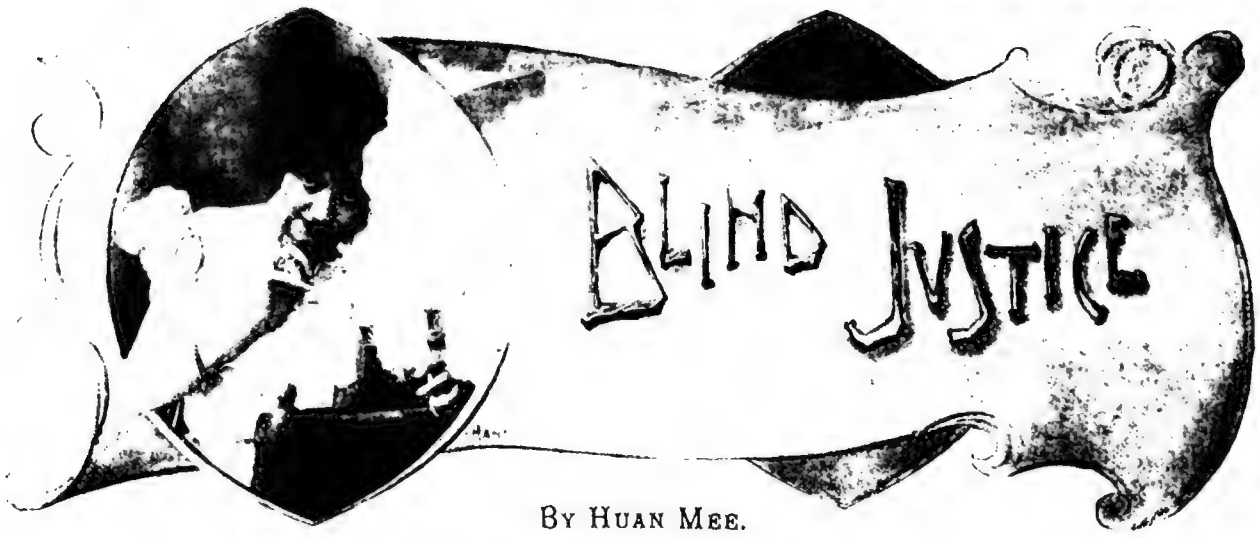
To Jonathan's plate, by a lucky fate,
It chanced that the wishbone fell;
Then softly said he to fair Dorothy:
"My lot shall this wishbone tell;

"I'll wish you and I, when a year slips by,
May dine on next Christmas Day,
With none to o'erhear, or to interfere,
And with all but ourselves away."

Then they broke the bone; with a stifled groan
He lost; and sighed heavily
To note the glad smile that she wore the while,
So he asked what *her* wish might be.

She blushed rosy red; "Well, I thought," she said,
"Lest you lose, 'twere surer this way;
For me to wish too, that your wish come true,
Your wish for the next Christmas Day."

LAURA SPENCER PORTER.



By Huan Mee.

MADEMOISELLE THERESA NORÈLE, the prima donna of comic opera, the dainty little piece of femininity who has taken the susceptible heart of London by storm, leans back in her chair and reflectively surveys her own piquant features in the triple mirror of her dressing-room.

The first act of the opera has just concluded, and, as usual, she has triumphed over all. Triumphed in that good-hearted, buoyant fashion of her own, and no other actor, or even actress, of the company has envied her her double call.

Good-hearted little woman, one of the best in a profession that is generosity itself. For a moment she pauses in the contemplation of herself, and picking up a stick of grease paint from the tray on her dressing-table writes a word or two upon the shining surface of the mirror. She had overheard a sad tale at the wings of ill-luck and bad fortune, and she must not forget.

The prima donna of comic opera.

She sinks back into her seat, glad of the rest that the twenty minutes *entr'acte* allows her, and drops into a reverie.

No one could resist the grace and abandon of Theresa Norèle. Everyone seemed to catch the contagion of her boundless spirits and merry laughter. On the stage or off she was a beam of sunshine, and no one could listen to the glorious melody of her clear, contralto voice without feeling some inner chord vibrate. She was the life, the soul, the essence of merriment—the crowned queen of light opera.

Even the venomous tongue of Slander, that so loves to prate against the theatre, and revels in whisperings about the denizens of that Bohemian land, was almost hushed, and dared no more than indulge in *sotto voce* mutterings that she was "light-hearted, feather-brained, and just the sort of woman who would, one of these days, do something audacious." What a cobweb to weave into a cable, but that was all Slander dare even hint—light-hearted, feather-brained. Nothing against her—*yet*.

Actually there was a virtuous woman upon the stage—and that the comic opera stage! An actress without a history—a singer, a dancer. It seemed positively absurd, and yet there was nothing, absolutely nothing, to get hold of. No slight indiscretion, no covert escapade by which her character could be blasted, her reputation ruined for ever.

Really it was unfortunate, it was nothing short of a calamity, and Slander bit its vicious tongue in blank defeat. What an extraordinary thing that she should evince no desire for the company of brainless sprigs of nobility, that the fashionable restaurants knew her not, and that no floral triumphs were handed across the footlights.

Watch as intently as the world might, there was nothing to discover. Scandal might be open-eyed, but it saw nothing. Slander might yearn to blazon forth its news trumpet-tongued, but it was dumb.

Then, in a word, she must be virtuous; but no—she was an actress—that was, of course, the explanation; simplicity itself.

This modesty and retirement was but a cloak. She would be sure to throw it open some day, and they would catch a glimpse beneath, and then—well, they would wait their opportunity.

The serious expression upon Theresa Norèle's face, as she leans back in her chair thinking, would have astonished many of her admirers in front had they been permitted to see it; there was something that bordered on the pathetic in that absent gaze that perhaps would have touched them, but more likely not. One never thinks that those who amuse have their own sorrows. No; they would not have been touched, they would have been irritated; they might even have resented it. She was to them the embodiment of youth, mirth, frivolity; her very name conjured up the light and colour of the stage and the melody of the airs with which her wondrous voice was associated, and to have seen an expression upon her face that caused the corners of her delicate mouth to droop a little and her eyes to take that pensive, far-away look, would have annoyed them. They would not have understood it; they would not have sympathised.

They adored her because she seemed so far removed from the common groove of their every-day lives; one whose existence was all sunshine and happiness, and if she wished to be sad, then it must be out of business hours.

Though her heart was breaking, what of that? She must go on and sing, and laugh, and laugh, too, with a genuine ring in it, the merry unaffected laugh that had captivated them. If not—well, they would say she was "going off," and the irresponsible critic would tell the public that her spirits were drooping, and sh was distinctly half a tone flat in the last note of the refrain of her best solo.

Ah! what an exhilarating existence the stage is, when one is quite well and fortune smiles; and yet sometimes, sometimes perhaps, when all one holds dear in life has been lost, it would be far easier to go through the most mundane daily toil than to laugh and sing to the tumultuous applause of the most enthusiastic audience.

At last, with a start, Mdlle Norèle wakes from her reverie, and with a light laugh of amusement occupies herself at her dressing-table.

"Dreaming again, Marie; why did you let me?"

"I thought it better not to arouse you," her maid and confidential friend replies, shaking out the dress for the second act. "You have ample time."

"Yes, yes; but it does no good. Be sure and wake me next time. Reflections on what might have been are bad for everyone."

The distant strains of the orchestra float into the room, and as she busies herself with her toilet she lightly hums the refrain of the serenade—

Good night! the shadows deepen on the river,
Like silver arrows sped
The shafts of light from Luna's dazzling quiver
Gleam through the trees o'erhead.
Good night! good night!
The rustling leaves are sighing.
Sweetheart, good night!

"Mdlle. Norèle. Second act, please."

"Very well."

Hastily she gives her hair and her dress the last feminine touches, and then stands irresolute, drawing on her gloves.

"I noticed Mr. Standish in front again to-night, Marie," she says. "He must be getting fearfully tired of the opera."

"I don't suppose he comes to see the show."

Theresa smiles a bewitching smile of gratification at her reflection in the glass, and then eyes her tiny satin shoe with a glance of modesty that would have done credit even to one who had never entered a theatre, much less sang nightly upon its stage.

At her next remark Scandal is almost startled from its accustomed state of cynicism, and listens delightedly.

"I suppose it is useless to ask him to come round and see me for five minutes," she murmurs, half reflectively. "He will only talk of the conventionalities and my duty to my—husband."

"Your duty to your husband," the maid retorts, with the freedom of a trusted servant, "is to forget all about him. Forget he spoilt your life and deserted you; take your happiness when you can get it, and don't fret your heart out."

"Ah!" with a long-drawn sigh. "It is a dream I indulge in now and again. He thinks but little of me."

"That's your fault; there was no need to tell him anything about your marriage. I expect your precious husband died long ago, or he wouldn't have left you alone so long when he must have known you were rich."

"If I could be sure he is dead things might be so different."

"Then try and satisfy yourself. Shall I send a note to Mr. Standish that you must see him to-night after the show?"

"Yes; he's in the stalls. Say I wish to speak to him ten minutes after the curtain is down, and you will stay in the room while he is here."

"Tush!"

"He will prefer it, and so shall I."

"Propriety," the girl answers, with a sniff. "You'll keep the stage waiting directly."

With a laughing shake of the head Mdlle. Norèle gathers up her skirts and trips downstairs, and a few minutes afterwards a burst of applause announces her entrance in the second act.

Punctual to the minute, Mdlle. Theresa Norèle, having discarded the silks and laces of the operatic star, and attired herself in the ordinary garb of an English lady, awaits the arrival of her visitor, and equally punctual he enters and gravely takes her hand, while Marie seats herself in the corner of the room and carefully screens everything from her gaze with a convenient *Era*.

Mdlle. Norèle occupies herself at her dressing-table.

"My dear Theresa," says Rupert Standish quietly, "this is very unwise."

"It is my own room, and my maid is present," she retorts, with a slight flush. "Surely that should be sufficient, even for your straight-laced English conventions," and then in a flash her momentary irritation vanishes, and she places her hand upon his as it rests upon the table. "I must see you sometimes, Rupert, if only for a few moments," she adds, with a catch in her voice.

Her visitor enters.

"But it is so unwise, my dear Theresa; you know how ready the world is to pronounce judgment upon a woman, and particularly upon a handsome woman who is an actress."

"I care less than nothing for the world's good opinion, so long as I have yours," she answers. "I know it is unwise, even foolish, but I cannot always do what you would call right. I *must* see you sometimes," and she looks pleadingly into his face. Rupert Standish bites his lip, and the hand that lies beneath hers, upon the table, trembles as he strives to master his emotions. He is nearer giving way than ever in his life before. What man could resist a woman whom he loves with a pleading look like that upon her face? A look that spoke, oh, so eloquently, infinitely more than either in cold words dared to utter.

It is a moment of wavering, of indecision; a moment that to both seems an eternity, and then the stern Puritanical conscience of the man comes to the rescue, and he leans forward and kisses her upon the forehead.

It is the first time he has kissed her, and a blush spreads over her face.

Strange. A kiss would have made her his for ever, and yet a kiss has sobered them.

"I wanted to see you to-night," she says, in an almost matter of fact voice, "because—because—I thought that as I have not seen my husband since he deserted me five years ago, he may——" She hesitates, and then suddenly changes the subject. "Will you excuse me a moment? I had almost forgotten I have to see the musical director, and then you shall put me into my carriage and I'll promise not to ask you to come up and see me again."

With a smile she turns away and runs down the stairs, and then the paper is dropped from before the eyes of the maid, and she stares, with more deliberation than politeness permits, into the perplexed face of Rupert Standish.

"Of course, it's your idea of honour," she says contemptuously, "to let a girl who adores you eat her heart out, and never whisper to her 'I love you.'"

"Be quiet, Marie. You do not understand; you are a good girl, but you can't help us."

"Help you, tush! If you were a man and not a stone statue, you'd need no helping. I know you cannot marry yet, and I know, as you do, that she owes not a vestige of duty to the scoundrel who left her years ago, and who, for all we ever hear, is dead. That's what we've got to prove; but is that any reason why you should let her fret her life out when three words would make her happy? You are willing to wait, and so is she. Why not wait in happiness, instead of misery?"

"I must see you sometimes," and she looks pleadingly into his face.

"It cannot be."

"It must. Now listen to me. If you could see her, and no one in the world should know but ourselves—would you?"

The man, stern Puritan though he is, hesitates and drums with his fingers upon the table.

"Would you?" she repeats.

"No, I dare not." He rises and impatiently paces the room, then suddenly pauses and faces her. "No, Marie, no; let things rest as they are for a little longer."

"Why should they?" she petulantly retorts. "Why dally like this, making yourself miserable and her as well? Now listen. To-morrow, Sunday night, I shall be out, and no one will be in her flat but herself; I shall never know whether you have been or not."

"It is impossible," he impetuously bursts in. "I will not compromise the woman I love."

"Because you love her, there will be no compromise. No one need see you come or go."

"No; I say no."

"I shall leave at seven and shall be back at nine. If you will not *see* her, go—and *listen*. Listen while she plays and sings the melodies that you have told her you admired the most. Go and listen, and then—then if you have the courage to be a man, enter, bend over her as she sings, kiss her and say 'I love you.'"

"No, I cannot."

"Here is my key; use it."

"No; do not tempt me."

"Do you think I offer you this to tempt you?" the girl cries. "Do you think there is another man in the whole wide world whom I would trust like this? You are an honourable man, and I want you to act as one with her. There can be no sacrifice of honour in telling her you love her—for it is the truth. Take it."

Almost mechanically Rupert extends his hand, takes the key, and places it in his pocket, and then, as in a dream, the next few moments pass, and he wakes to find himself watching the rapidly fading lights of Theresa's carriage, with his fingers clasped upon the key.

* * * * * * * *

The hands of the dainty timepiece in Mdlle. Nordle's drawing-room point to seven. She is alone. Alone to sit and dream, to fancy what might have been, what perhaps yet may be—who knows?

Sunday evening. The one night of all the week that she can call her own, the one evening when she can be serious if she so wishes; the one evening that she can keep for her very self to rest and think; and so, with eyes gazing into the fire, she sits, building her fairy castles, dreaming her hopeful visions in the land of the yet to be—the Island of Hopes—the future.

Strange pastime for an actress, a young and pretty woman, to sit quietly at home as other people might, and think, when according to accepted theory she should have been dining *tête-à-tête* at a fashionable restaurant off Piccadilly.

And yet she seems perfectly content in her self-elected solitude, as she gazes thoughtfully into the glowing fire. Something seems to tell her that fortune at last is going to smile, everything is to come right, and her patient waiting is to be rewarded. Of course she did not believe in presentiments; whoever confesses that they do? But what was it that made her feel so high-spirited, so light-hearted, so supremely happy to-night? Could it be those foolish little hints of Marie's, that perhaps he would overcome his scruples and call on her that night, spend just an hour with her, with none to overhear?

No, no. She did not expect that. How could she?

Rupert Standish's steadfast icy creed was to be nothing until he could be all. She shook her head with a wise little look. Perhaps she thought all the more of him for his firmness—and yet suppose he did—what a happy evening it might be. There was no harm; there could be no question of compromising with such a man, and—well, perhaps he would. She smiles that sunny smile of hers. Yes, perhaps he would come; perhaps Marie *knew* he intended to call. With the womanly instinct upon her she rises and gazes at herself in the mirror, and is satisfied. The delicate flush of excitement upon her cheek heightens her beauty, and standing with her elbow resting on the mantelpiece, the ruddy light of the fire flashing on her soft, white robes, she hopes he will come, if only for a few minutes. Then suddenly her heart beats wildly, there is a sound of footsteps in the outer corridor, and then a cautious rat-tat on the door.

Her presentiment *was* right. It is he.

Lightly she runs across the room, through the hall-way, and opens the door, only to start back with a cry of terror as a man enters and deliberately closes and fastens the door behind him.

"You, Maurice!" she gasps.

"You, Maurice," he mimics, with a sneer. "Oh, yes; it's Maurice right enough. I thought you'd be getting anxious about me, so I've called."

She stretches forth her hands to open the door and escape, but with a curse he grips her arm and drags her back.

"Oh, no, you don't, you're going to talk to your husband now he has returned. Come along, my lady," and he forces her back into the drawing-room and pushes her into a seat.

"You cowardly brute, you've almost broken my arm."

"Bah! Broken your arm, I'll break your head if you play any of these tantrums with me."

For one instant Theresa looks him steadily in the face, and then the old fear and horror of the man returns, and she becomes ghastly pale, and trembles in every limb. So, then, this was the fulfilment of her presentiment. Irony of fate. This is why she felt so light-hearted. Now that happiness had almost reached its pinnacle, the curse of her life had come back, and everything that might have been must wither up and die. Would that she could die herself, fade right out of life, even as she sits there with her hands tightly clenched in her lap. Then suddenly through the numbed feeling that has taken chilling grip upon her heart there beats upon her tortured brain one lightning vision of all that she has lost. Her lips twitch, her fingers relax, and convulsively she throws her head forward into her hands and bursts into a paroxysm of hysterical sobs.

"Stop that snivelling, Baby," he shouts, maddening her by the pet name that was hers when she loved him, and he was a man and not a brute. "Stop it, and talk business. Give me some whisky. I'm parched."

"You shall have nothing here," she gasps, her voice quivering with fear; "and, besides, I have none."

"Well, if you haven't got whisky, I reckon you've got brandy; you keep it as a medicine, I suppose. Give me that."

Silently she points to the adjoining room, which the man enters, and then, like a flash, she rises to close the door and lock it upon him, when he turns and leers at her.

"Going to shut me in, and escape, eh? Curse you," and one side of her ghastly face turns crimson. "Don't play those games on me," he continues, as he seats himself and pours out half a tumbler of spirits, "I might not be contented to use only the back of my hand next time."

"You, Maurice!" she gasps.

"What do you want with me?"

"Want! Oh, nothing in particular, but I'm your husband. I'm hard up, and you're making tons of money, so I think we may as well keep together once again, and give the world an example of connubial bliss."

"Never."

"I say we will," he answers with an oath. "What's yours is mine, and I'll have it. Why should I walk the streets without a shilling while you're living in the lap

of luxury? Besides, I've half fallen in love with you again, you little spitfire. Here I am, and here I'll stop."

"No, no, leave me, let me live in peace. You shall have money."

"Ah! I mean to," and he laughs a brutal, callous laugh.

"I will give you nearly every penny I earn," she continues, with a sob, "if you promise to leave me alone, never to see me, to let me live in peace."

"I intend to have every penny, and I shall live in this flat—it's very comfortable—as your husband."

Stung to madness by his words, and the jeering tone in which they are uttered, she rises and confronts him with a look of deadly obstinacy in her face. This woman is not quite the cowed and frightened child she was when he left her to fight the world, friendless and alone; still, she has upon her the horror of the man, but it is tempered by the greater respect she owes to herself.

He rises, and viciously digs at the fire with the short brass-headed poker.

"It's a jolly snug little crib, and I shall stop," he repeats. "A big income and a really good-looking wife—it will suit me down to the ground."

"You have heard my terms," she says, in a voice of dogged determination. "Let me live my life in peace, and you shall have all; molest me, and you shall have nothing."

"Your terms, indeed; your terms! Nothing. Ah!" He grips her by the arm, and twists it till she winces with the pain. "I will have all you've got. You hear me—all."

"I have no money here."

"Then I'll take a cheque for a couple of hundred to start on. Do you hear? Write it."

"No."

His face reddens with drunken fury, as he almost crushes her slender arm and forces her to her knees.

"Will you now?"

"No."

"Now?"

"N—n—no," and a smothered moan of anguish escapes her.

"Then take that, curse you."

Like a flash the brass-knobbed poker is shortened in his hand, and Theresa falls a huddled mass upon the fur rug by the fireplace.

For a moment he is sobered, and drops the weapon, and then, as she does not stir, kneels down by her side, and a sickly pallor spreads over his degraded features.

"Heavens! she's dead!"

He staggers to his feet, clutches at the table for support, and then seeks courage in the brandy bottle.

"It's the rope," he cries, with a gasp, "the rope if they catch me," and his eyes are riveted with an almost maniacal stare upon that heap upon the floor.

"Curse it," he mutters. "Why did she thwart me?"

He glances at the clock—only twenty minutes past seven, and then his terror

"Then take that, curse you."

"Heavens! she's dead!"

seems to pass away as he drains the last drop of brandy and crosses to the casement window.

A balcony filled with flowers will, he perceives, allow of easy descent to the ground. The outer door is locked; if he is interrupted he can escape by the window, if not he will dodge the hall porter, just as when he entered. *Good*; then all is safe.

Noiselessly he proceeds, walking on tiptoe, and going round and round the room to avoid what lies there silent on the rug. Gently laying one of the little gilt chairs upon its side, he bends his weight upon it, snaps the legs, and casts the broken fragments upon the floor.

Then the Venetian glass épergne is crushed beneath his feet, and with its scattered flowers placed amid the folds of the fancy table cover that hangs down to the ground. A couple of the Worcester vases on the mantelpiece are carefully shattered and left lying upon the tiled hearth. The music is swept from the piano and scattered on the carpet. A cluster of palms and ferns is torn from the nook in which they stood, and trampled to pieces. The rugs are half rolled over and disordered, and the curtains wrenched down and torn. Everything is absolute chaos, and the white robed figure lies silent amid the wreck.

Standing with his back to the door, the devastator surveys the room, which now gives evidence of a deadly struggle, a desperate hand-to-hand fight for life—and chuckles. Yet he is not quite satisfied with the havoc he has wrought, for he walks over to the fireplace, keeping as far as he can from that silent figure, and picks up the tiny French clock from the mantelpiece.

"A mute record of the time of the——" The last word dies in his throat—he dare not say "murder." "Good," he mutters, and then pushing the hands from 7.35 to 8.30, he knocks the clock upon the marble curb of the fender, breaking the works, and throws it upon the rug.

Not a sound is to be heard, as he listens at the door, and then quietly he opens it, steps out, saunters downstairs, and into the street. By ten minutes to eight he is at Temple Station, and takes a third-class ticket to Whitechapel, and at twenty past he rollingly emerges from a gin palace in the Mile End Road, and falls into the gutter, only to rise again and unsteadily stagger down the street. A bricklayer, seemingly in the same riotous state as himself, is staggering towards him, and they collide. In a moment a crowd has gathered round, cheering the combatants, who roll and scuffle and swear on the pavement.

At 8.30 Maurice Lancey, dirty, drunken, and dishevelled, is supported by a couple of constables while the inspector enters a charge of "drunk and disorderly, and provoking a breach of the peace."

And an irrefutable *alibi* is arranged.

* * * * * *

The key of her flat. Rupert had looked at it more than once during the day, and now he slips it into his pocket as he dresses for dinner. He cannot help smiling a little as he remembers the melodramatic manner in which Marie had intrusted it to him, but then, she was a French woman, and accordingly somewhat ultra-sentimental in affairs of the heart.

It pleased her fancy, he mused, that he should quietly enter, stand behind Theresa while she played his favourite airs, and then suddenly bend over her and—kiss her. It was all very poetic and dramatic, but to his sound, English common-sense it seemed far more probable that such an unexpected appearance would give her a sudden shock, and possibly bring about results that were not in the calculations of the sentimental Marie. But, after all, what was there to prevent his going?

And in this uncertain frame of mind Rupert dined, wrestling with his firm resolve, dallying with his fixed ideas of honour, resisting a temptation that was merely a violation of his own starched law of what was right and was wrong.

It is just half-past seven. He can reach there, spend an hour, and leave, and no one but themselves need know. But if they should? If Slander should repeat that he had been there with her alone. What then?

If Slander with vile invention should elaborate a history of his secret visit—what then?

He understood what then; the world is always so eager to listen to stories against those who are famous in its eyes.

So he decides he will *not* go, that is, he will not call; if presently he should walk that way and listen while she sings, it can do no harm, but he will not *see* her. Resolute in this fixed determination, he makes his way towards the mansions, where he knows she lives. There is no one in the hall, and he mounts the staircase still resolved that he will listen but for a few moments, and then leave as he came—unseen. Eight o'clock chimes as he waits in the corridor—waits to hear her sing—listens for a voice that is still.

There is a horrible stillness pervading the atmosphere that seems to freeze his heart. Perhaps she has fainted, perhaps she has been taken ill, and there is no one to help her. Shall he go or stay? He waits awhile; no sound.

The half-hour chimes without. He grasps the burnished knocker with nervous fingers, and, gently rapping, looks again.

Still there is no sound, no movement, not a stir, and then he recollects the key, and breathing a sigh of relief, casts all his resolves to the wind. She may need help, that is enough. He turns the lock, throws open the door, and with a swift step crosses the hall and enters the room.

* * * * * * * *

Extract from the leading article in *The Morning Mail*, October 29th, 1886:

The greatest and most sensational murder trial of the century is over. Stern justice has been satisfied. "He that sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed" . . . It is with feelings akin to awe that we recall the inscrutable workings of Providence in this case. Mademoiselle Theresa Noricle, one of the most charming women who ever graced the opera stage, was discovered in her flat on Sunday evening, September 5th, killed by a violent blow upon the temple, inflicted by a heavy blunt instrument, presumably a brass-headed poker, found lying by her side.

The terrible discovery was made by her maid, Marie, the woman who gave the most damning evidence in the case, who upon returning from a visit shortly before nine o'clock discovered her mistress lying dead upon the floor, and her murderer, Rupert Standish, the man now condemned to death, kneeling as though turned to stone, by her side. "A sure sign of innocence," urged the defence, but a plea that was rightly ignored. No man is a murderer by instinct, and he must be a cold-blooded scoundrel indeed who could kill a woman, who perhaps loved him, and yet remain unaffected. We can understand a little the paroxysm of rage in which the fatal blow was struck, and the deadly revulsion of feeling that must have followed, the unstringing of the taut nerves, the after breakdown, the lethargy of despair, and then—capture.

What the events were that preceded that awful struggle are buried with her. That a struggle—a fierce and deadly struggle—for life did take place was evident by the chaos of the room, and in that unwitnessed battle the finger of Providence ordained the overthrow of the clock, which broke in its fall and marked the precise moment of the crime.

Had it not been for that mute testimony, who knows but what an innocent man might not be the inmate of the cell of the condemned Maurice Lancey, the husband of the unfortunate Theresa Noricle, from whom for years she had been separated.

The broken clock marked the hour of the crime and saved the life of an innocent man. At exactly half-past eight on Sunday evening the crime was committed, and the defence raised the question of motive, asserting that only one man could have done the deed, and that man her husband, the man whom, presumably, she lived in dread of. The shattered timepiece gave the lie direct to such a plea. Do not let it for one single moment be assumed that we have a shadow of sympathy for Maurice Lancey, who looked, as he stood in the witness-box, the lowest type of the human race. Yet repulsiveness does not constitute a murderer, and at the hour of the crime he was proved to have been at the other end of London, locked up in a police cell on the vulgar charge of "drunkenness and disorderly conduct."

It is needless to further recapitulate the evidence of the trial. The murderer, no doubt, believed that he had entered the mansions unobserved, but luckily he was seen by the doorkeeper, who, however, naturally assumed he was visiting one or other of the tenants in the building. The doorkeeper swore that Rubert Standish entered at exactly eight o'clock, and he was found by the maid kneeling by the side of the murdered woman at nine. We prefer not to discuss theories, but, for some reason that never was explained, the maid, Marie, gave Standish the key of the flat, and was absent at the time of his call.

What becomes of the unsupported plea of innocence, the plea that he only entered just before the maid returned, when the grim hour from eight to nine cannot be accounted for? Why did he have the key if not to use it. "Why," to a lapt the very words of the Crown, "if eventually he did use it did he later for three-quarters of an hour before opening the door; and why, upon discovering the grim some tragedy that had taken place, did he *not* instantly raise the alarm? If he did not kill Theresa Noricle, and, as was conclusively proved, her husband could not have done so, who did?"

"Good," he mutters.

Were it not that an event of life or death was in the balance, the trial would have been almost a farce. . . . Rupert Standish, unconcerned and callous as he has been throughout the fearful trial, awaits the last dread sentence of the law. Then let the law take its course. Let there be no effeminate cry for a reprieve, for surely no convicted murderer more richly deserved his end than the cold-blooded wretch who now stands beneath the grim shadow of Newgate's scaffold.

A Turn of the Wheel.

By E. and H. Heron.

Two men lay on the rough, earthen floor of a ruined tower, their shoulders propped against the smoothest stones they could find in the mortarless wall. It was a kennel of a place, full of ancient odours, but the soldiers had only regarded the salient fact that the roof and walls were thick, and still sound enough to furnish safe custody to their prisoners. Outside a wind from the sea rustled the tops of the great forest trees, while, dimly seen between their tossing heads, a thin moon was crawling up into an amber sky. Within, a faint light falling through the barricaded door showed that one of the prisoners had apparently surrendered himself to his fate, but the other rose restlessly, and, drawing himself up to the slit in the wall, peered out into the night.

"It is ten o'clock," he said.

"Then lie down, my friend," replied the other, in fairly fluent Spanish, and he yawned, "your energy cannot help us."

"To-morrow we shall lie still enough," said the first gloomily.

"And there will be an end of these big mosquitoes."

The Spaniard dropped from the window, but he remained looking up into the night sky. It was horrible, this sudden thrust from the sunny warmth of life into the cold shadow! He turned his head as his companion, the Englishman, rolled his tattered legs into a more comfortable position.

"For my part," said the Englishman, after a while, "I've seen good and evil, I've had luck and pleasure in my day; what can a man want more? I have lived long enough."

"Give me three hours in the forest—three short hours," returned the Spaniard, in a sort of frenzy, "and I could come back and say the same!"

The Englishman, as if baulked in his desire for rest, got up and approached the Spaniard.

"I seem to have seen you before," said the latter, looking up into the taller man's rugged face, "but I do not know your name. As for me, I am Don Quirno Raceda, the aide-de-camp of General Gregorio of the Patriotic Party, and—I carry the fate of the Republic in my pocket!"

"My name's Brown," replied the other.

"Brown," repeated Raceda, still considering his companion and drawing his own conclusions, which embodied themselves quaintly in his next words, "Don," he said, giving the noble prefix and paused, but Brown did not attempt to fill the gap, "Don ——Brown."

"Don——Brown if you like," said the Englishman, with a short laugh, "But the fate of the Republic which you say you carry—let us hear about it. And how those men," nodding towards the door, "allowed you to keep it."

Raceda gave a rapid account of himself. He was a lieutenant, who had remained faithful to the Government when the Revolution broke out. He had that morning left headquarters with a dispatch for General Gregorio in the lining of his leggings, which dispatch contained information of the first importance concerning the intentions and projected movements of the revolutionary army.

"Had I but reached the camp, we must have won the game," he exclaimed, in a furious whisper. "now these wolves, who want but to empty the treasury, and to exploit the country for their own purposes, will beat us! You know what the Patriotic Party have done since they came into power two years ago? Our credit has been re-established, the executive placed on a firm——"

"Just so," said Brown, cutting him short. "I'll take it for granted that your party is as honest as it is given to the breed to be; besides, it happens to be the side I am on myself."

"What can we do?" asked the younger man eagerly.

Brown looked up at the window, which now framed the moon as in a picture, and shook his head. Then they subsided into silence, during which they could hear the growling talk of their guards outside and the rattle and clink of the horses stamping at their heel-ropes.

"The first thing to do," said Brown, presently, "is to take out that dispatch and read it. One of us may get through."

The dispatch was accordingly extracted, and read by the aid of sundry matches, and within ten minutes the two men had its contents by heart.

"The next thing is to make a meal of the paper," went on Brown. "By the way, what do you suppose these fellows mean to do with us?"

"Shoot us!" said Raceda with promptness.

"I think not," returned Brown thoughtfully.

"They have already sent for a warrant. They do not neglect the forms of justice, because they may have to answer for such acts later on, and it is convenient, under certain circumstances, to have a registered warrant to refer to. At daybreak we shall be taken out and shot against the wall of this tower."

"You forget that I am a British subject."

"Yes," admitted Raceda, "I forgot that."

"They'll shoot us," said Brown, "on horseback."

"On horseback?"

"It's quite simple. With the dawn we'll be taken out, shoved on a couple of nags, without being in any way secured, and marched into Mentana under escort of the dozen soldiers outside. On the way, one of the men will contrive to make his horse stumble, and the remainder will blow our brains out under pretence of thinking we were about to make our escape. It is one matter to put a British subject up against a wall and order a file of men to fire into him, and a totally different affair to blow his brains out when trying to escape. And it is easy for a dozen men to swear that we did attempt an escape. You see?"

"Yes, yes; but you have a plan. What is it?" cried the Spaniard.

"It is not a good plan, but it may possibly be worked," replied Brown. "You'll see, they won't even take the trouble to ask us for our parole to-morrow."

After a few minutes spent in explanation, Brown lay down and went to sleep But sleep was impossible for Raceda. He listened to the Englishman's strong, even breathing, and rocked himself to and fro in a frenzy of impotence. Now and then he scrambled up to the narrow window to look, with hot, excited eyes, towards the twinkles in the blue above the trees. The moon had sunk, but night still brooded over the forest.

"Brown, Brown," he repeated, under his breath, the English, hedge-side, commonplace name rolling strangely on his tongue, "I have heard of him in truth. A devil of a man! Was it not he who broke Rodriguez's arm with a blow? And they say he tossed a dollar to decide which party he should fight for. It fell to us, and this, no doubt, is he."

He sat down and looked at the supine figure of the unlovely Brown stretched on the floor, his dark, thick moustache, his heavy, sloping shoulders, and he admired the man, who slept so calmly, if noisily, until Death should tap at the door. And, lastly, he wondered about the plan—the chance suggested by the Englishman, and, as he wondered, his head fell forward on his breast in a sleep of pure weariness.

It was thus that the ugly, little soldiery found them when the sun began to disperse the morning mists. As Brown had prophesied, they placed the prisoners on two miserable barebacked ponies, and set out along the forest track, Brown and Raceda not being secured in any way, save that half-a-dozen carbines

The Spaniard dropped from the window.

marched beside them and another half-dozen behind. Brown, putting his heels into his mount, advanced to the side of the captain, a little yellow-ochre man, with an ominous smile and the air of one who plays a deep game.

Raceda watched Brown as he laughed and talked until the yellow captain laughed also, and more than ever he admired this broken gentleman-rover, who was ready to jest with fate.

Presently Brown looked back at the dirty muzzles of the carbines held in a line with his liver.

"I wonder if you are to have the pleasure of shooting me, captain?" he said.

The captain suggested grimly that it was for the coming court-martial to pronounce whether he should have that unfortunate duty to perform.

Brown flung up his head with a reckless gesture.

"You see," he said, laughing, "I've had the devil's luck. After the *pronunciamento*, I tossed a coin to see which side to take. Patriots, heads; your party, tails. It turned up heads, and now my head is going to pay for the spin. To lose your life by a mere fluke is unlucky, you will allow, my dear captain."

Yes, the captain agreed that it was unlucky, and was about to add more when he chanced to notice that they were approaching the outskirts of the forest. The track had grown wider, and the horses' hoofs fell silently in the dust pools. At this point the trees rose thick and gloomy, with patches of undergrowth. Brown was engaged in complimenting the yellow captain on the excellence of the roan he bestrode—an uncommon colour in those latitudes—when the captain spoke in an altered tone.

"Fall back a little, señor. We are now no more than three miles from the camp of General Gregorio. Close up there!" he continued, turning with a peculiar glance to the troopers. "You, Manuel, pass on the other side."

With that he sheered away towards a clump of undergrowth, for the troops, under stress of excitement, are apt to shoot wild.

"Now look out, Raceda!" said Brown softly, as, obedient to the order, he fell back for an instant.

Brown held the Captain, hands down, in front of him on the saddle.

Raceda never knew what happened next. Brown's horse sprang suddenly forward. There was a hoarse roar, a struggle, and a stampede led by the lame bay that had carried Brown. The cavalcade closed up and galloped after it into the open, firing at the same time as if they expected Brown to appear from under its belly. But Brown had disappeared, and with him the little yellow captain.

Then came a yell from behind the trees in the captain's familiar voice: "Don't fire! Don't fire! For the love of the Virgin, don't shoot!"

At the same moment the roan swept wildly out of the grove with Brown upon its back. It was only at a second glance that they saw it carried double, for Brown held the captain, hands down, in front of him on the saddle. Raceda, who had fallen with a bullet in his back at the beginning of the scrimmage, raised himself on his elbow.

"*Viva el Inglés!*" he shouted. "Bravo, a man among men is this Don Brown!" and he fell back senseless on the bloodstreaked road.

Meanwhile Brown kept a tight grip round the little captain's body, who continued to adjure his men by every saint in the calendar not to fire. And in his ear Brown dropped terse comments on the inefficiency of the shooting, and the exact odds in his favour from a mathematical point of view, at the same time admitting that a free use of the spurs might be his best chance of escape.

The captain needed no urging; he spurred and bellowed as frantically as even Brown could desire. The troopers on their wretched horses tailed away gradually behind, even forgetting to go back and knife Raceda by way of finish.

Within a mile of the Government outposts the pursuit was over, and Brown permitted the roan to drop into a more reasonable pace.

"So it appears that luck has turned, and you are my prisoner, not I yours," observed Brown with the cheerfulness he had shown throughout the day. The little captain swore freely.

"I'm not sure," said Brown, "that it is not my duty to shoot you in case of an escape, you know."

The captain wriggled.

"Let me suggest a wiser course, señor," he said in a milder tone. "I am a rich man, and under the circumstances I fancy my ransom may come into your hands."

So they rode into the Patriotic camp; the yellow-grey captain in front, the heavy-shouldered, ruddy Englishman behind. The captain was quickly consigned to a hut with the regulation guard, and Brown was led to the General's tent.

He explained the position and added that Raceda had dispatches for the General.

"We are infinitely obliged for your services," said General Gregorio, "though it appears to me that you have given a very meagre account of your enterprise. Is there any way in which I can serve you?"

Brown thanked him suitably, but it seemed that what he most needed at that moment were a few well-mounted men to go with him to fetch in Raceda.

The wounded man had managed to crawl away from the baking heat of the open road to the shelter of the undergrowth by the wayside.

"The dispatch?" he asked faintly, as Brown raised him. "You have told the General?"

"On the contrary, my dear Raceda, I imagined, and, as it turns out rightly, that you would yourself be in a condition to deliver it. It was in the first instance intrusted to you."

"You are too generous! You are already a volunteer—they would have given you promotion!"

"Instead I shall have the pleasure of congratulating you on your promotion."

"But you? the plan was yours."

"I have not forgotten myself," replied Brown, laughing, "I have the captain."

"The captain?"

"Yes, the captain, who held us prisoners last night. When I receive his ransom, I shall go to Paris, and renew my acquaintance with the Opéra Bouffe."

And so it happened. Don Quirno Raceda obtained promotion, and is to-day a General, and a man of note in his own country.

Brown went to Paris as he said. He is Brown still—without any prefix—and the proud possessor of the clothes on his back, and the cigarettes in his pocket, and when last heard of was engaged on the Indian frontier

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(SPECIAL LIST.)

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BY BEATRICE HERON-MAXWELL.

HE was dressed in the unconventional garb of a travelling artist, and the loose brown velveteen coat, a little less shabby than it should have been, suited well the square, strong figure, while the soft Homburg hat, tilted back on his comely head, showed to advantage a broad intellectual brow, shadowed by dark hair, and a pair of grave, handsome, slate-grey eyes.

To the girl who sat silent, watching him from under her downcast lids, he was an ideal, an inspiration; in her eyes he possessed all the outward attributes and all the inward qualities that combine to make a divinity—a hero; his advent to the quiet, hillside village where she had dreamed away her life hitherto was as the coming of a fairy Prince whose touch should waken all her sleeping senses, and teach her that to wake was to love, and to love was to live! But whether it were for pleasure or for pain she did not know, so closely were they allied in her heart.

Each night she counted the hours until the dawn came—the glad dawn that should bring her to the moment when across the fields she would watch for his coming, and would know the dear delight of feeling that it was for her he lingered, and that the beauty she had prized so little yet had power to keep him for another day. And as the day waned, the fear that the picture would be finished and that he would say good-bye would take the lightness from her step and the gladness from her heart, and send her home drooping and sad.

He was smoking a cigarette, and waiting for the mood to come for continuing his work. It was so nearly finished that he did not care to hurry. Life in this idyllic corner of the world was pleasant, and he had found more interest in it here than at any other place he had touched upon in his wanderings.

This pretty child was well worth painting.

He glanced at her critically.

There was some new grace in her attitude and in the down-drooped head that roused in him again the surprise he had felt the first day he saw her.

Beautiful village maidens were of course a hackneyed subject for both painters and poets, but to him they had remained till now an unknown quantity.

In his own sphere he had been accustomed to view with indifference loveliness that amounted almost to perfection; but there was some unnamed charm about this girl that roused him to real interest, and every day her influence over him had strengthened.

Here was a beauty so genuine that even the unbecoming, ill-made dress and the absence of all adjuncts could not detract from it; a beauty of feature as well as of colouring, a finished piece of exquisite workmanship, with all the varied graces that as a rule are derived from many models combined in one. Here, too, was a mind too intelligent to be called ignorant, in spite of an unavoidable lack of the knowledge that only good education and much reading can bring; a mind that would well repay the care of cultivation, and would render her a companion to anyone, no matter what difference in station lay between them.

"Muriel," he said suddenly—more for the sake of noting the animation in her face that would come with his words than because he wished to speak—"you have never asked me my name nor my history, yet I know all yours—by heart."

She flushed a little, and smiled faintly.

"I can guess it," she answered, "or at least I think so. I have made a little romance about you, and if it were not true I should be sorry. I would rather believe it always."

"Will you tell me your romance?" he asked gently.

"I think not," she hesitated, "yet—if you wish to know it. Only you must let me keep it. I do not want it altered."

"You shall keep it," he promised, "always if you care to."

"I think," she said, lifting her hand and pointing to the horizon, "that you come from far away over there, and that the world you come from is as different to this of mine as the sea is to this little river of ours. I feel that you have had power of many kinds; that you have been accustomed to take the first place, and to taste of every pleasure that money or rank can give, and it has wearied you beyond endurance, so that you have said to yourself: 'Let me go away—let me learn my own value and the value of all these surroundings of mine—let me find my own level, and I may learn to be content.'"

He had thrown away his cigarette and was looking at her intently.

"And my own level is—where?" he asked quietly.

"Just where it was before," she answered, too absorbed in her own thoughts to note his interest; "you cannot put aside the distinction that is yours by right of nature; you were meant to be first in any case."

"Then how shall I find content?" he asked.

"Only by learning to love your life for someone else's sake," she said, "instead of for your own."

He had drawn nearer to her while she spoke, and now he took her hand.

"Listen," he said, "you are right about my life. It has been too easy for me. Desirable things came to me so naturally, so inevitably, in it, that I ceased to care for them. I voluntarily gave it up, and it would be difficult for me to go back to it now; I am not even sure that it would be fair, because by this time another has filled my place, and is enjoying what I had ceased to enjoy."

She was silent, and she had become very pale, but her hand still rested in his.

"Ten years ago," he said, "I was Claude Merivale Viscount Fielding; then there was a blank interval in my life—now I am Claude Merivale, the painter, whose pictures are known, but whose personality remains unknown still. For a time I had a fancy to find complete extinction, and in that I succeeded, for the world believes me dead. Later I had a fancy to see if I could make a name for myself, and in that, too, I was successful. Now my sole ambition is to find a woman who will love my name only because it belongs to me, who will care for me so much that she will let me live my life out by her side in my own way, and never urge me to go back to the old barren dreariness and wearisome ease of a life that is ready made for one. Muriel, have I found her—sweet—knowing all this, can you care for me, can you say: 'Claude, I have no higher ambition for myself than to be your wife, no higher ambition for you than to be my husband?'"

She turned her face to meet his; the glowing brightness of her cheeks, the happy love-light in her eyes were all-sufficient in their answer.

"Darling," he said, "are you sure that you can be content? Are you certain that the time will never come when you will say: 'There is the name to which you were born, there is the name you have built up for yourself—claim one, or both, before the world; and satisfy my heart?'"

She laid her head upon his shoulder.

"Your name is Claude to me, I want no other," she said. "If the time ever comes when the world finds you out, remember that I cared for you when you were just yourself."

He drew her gently to him. "We will let Fate decide it for us," he said, "I will quarrel with it no longer now that it has given to me my heart's desire."

She turned her face to meet his.

Some achieve Greatness

PRELUDE

"IT'S no good, Nell; I am getting tired—weary—out of heart," said the girl who was sitting on the edge of the table, balancing herself with one small, badly-shod foot.

"I might go on singing in the chorus, as I am doing now, with my three little lines of solo for twenty years without getting any further. How is one to make a name? Who is likely to take any notice of me as long as I stand in a row of other girls all doing exactly the same thing?"

"Everything comes to those who wait," said Nell, setting her words rhythmically to the monotonous sound of her typewriter.

"To those who know how to wait," corrected Maisie, "and I don't know how to wait and never shall. I want a thing at once or not at all. I am so different to you. You are content to go on being just Nell Harmar, and make enough by typing and scribbling to buy bread-and-butter, and a new bonnet occasionally. But then you have this little wee flat all to yourself, and no relations to bother you. You are a dear, and I wish I were like you, but I'm not."

"I am only tolerably content," said Nell, gathering up her sheets of paper and stabbing them in the corner with a clip; "I should like to make a name, too, some day."

"What chance have I?" pursued Maisie. "If I were in Leila St. Clair's place I might be as great a success as she is! I feel that I have it in me. Night after night when she is playing 'The Only Girl,' I am acting it all with her—singing her songs, dancing her dances, losing myself so completely in her part that in the last scene, when she makes her great hit, I am quite spent and worn out with emotion and effort. If I were only her under-study and could take her place for a single evening! I have as much, in fact, more, voice—I can dance as well as she does, and, though I don't want to seem conceited, I believe I am very nearly as good-looking."

She glanced towards the mirror over the mantelpiece with a frank look of criticism, unalloyed, in spite of her words, by any self appreciation. The reflection that met her gaze would have justified a more superlative commendation.

Even Leila St. Clair herself might have gladly exchanged her own piquant prettiness for the wonderful golden eyes with their setting of dark lashes, the softly curling brown hair with glints of sunshine in its waves, the clear pale skin, and the lips whose fresh sweet curves belied the discontented words they uttered.

"I think I could be more patient if I were happy at home," she resumed, "but my stepmother and those two dreadful girls are insupportable—impossible! How my father can stand it I don't know; but after all he is a voluntary victim, whereas I am a most involuntary one. Besides, he could end it if he cared to. A little decision and energy is all that is needed; without that he must suffer. But there are days, like to-day, when I feel as if I must give it all up, never go to the theatre again, never go home any more—just—disappear!" Her voice broke, and there was a suggestion of tears in her last words. Nell sat looking straight before her for a few minutes after her friend had spoken; then suddenly a light flashed into her eyes, a colour rose on her cheeks, and she sprang to her feet, the illumination of her face making her look almost handsome.

She crossed the room rapidly and laid both hands on Maisie's shoulders.

"You want success," she said, "and you don't care to work your way up to it as I intend to do. You must make a name at once; you would prefer to die, or to disappear, rather than wait for it. Very well. Give yourself into my hands—do as I tell you, and you shall have your wish."

Maisie stared straight into her face without replying.

"Promise that you will follow my directions implicitly, right through to the end," continued Nell, "and I guarantee that your name shall be made in a week."

"A week!" repeated Maisie, the incredulity in her face giving way a little before the other's earnestness and resolution. "It is nothing disgraceful or dishonourable, of course, Nell——"

"I do not think it either," said Nell, "and your own part will be merely passive. The whole responsibility rests with me. Obedience is all I ask from you."

Maisie hesitated—then, reassured by the steadfast look and tone, "I promise," she said.

Nell walked over to her writing-table, and took up a packet of manuscript.

"You must do one little thing for me first," she said. "This MS. was to have been typed and given in to the *Rotten Row Magazine* last night. I am rather late with it. Will you take it for me to the office? It is not so very far from here, and give it to the editor yourself? If he is not in, ask for one of the assistant editors—I want to be sure that it reaches their hands safely. Afterwards, no! stay." She took up a piece of notepaper, and began writing. "I will give you your directions in an envelope. Don't open it till you leave the office, and then do what it tells you without fail."

She handed the letter, her face still glowing with excitement, to Maisie, and led her to the hall door.

"It's a deserted-looking place, this mansion of mine," she said, with a laugh, as she glanced down the public staircase with its grey stone uncarpeted steps and dust-laden windows. "I scarcely ever meet anyone coming up or down. The other flats might be empty of inhabitants for all I see of them! Well, good-bye, Maisie, and good luck to you."

She leant over the balustrade and listened to the echo of her friend's footsteps till they died away below; then, with a sigh, half of anxiety, half of relief, went back to her cheery little sitting-room, shutting out the loneliness and silence of the staircase with a bang of her own front door.

* * * * * *

INTERLUDE.

Paragraph in the *Star*, sixth edition:

A YOUNG LADY MISSING.

We hear that Miss Maisie Adeane, who has been lately singing in the chorus of "The Only Girl," has been missing from her home since Thursday afternoon. Her relatives, believing her to be at the theatre as usual, made no inquiries that night, but finding yesterday morning that she had not returned became anxious about her. They are unable at present to find any trace of her.

Paragraph in the *Morning Post*:

Miss Maisie Adeane, of the New Theatre, has disappeared suddenly from her home, and at present no trace of her whereabouts can be found. It seems that she has been missing since the afternoon of Thursday.

Advertisements in the agony column of the *Standard*:

Your father is greatly distressed. Please return or write. Will endeavour to make your home happier in future.—Stepmother.

Maisie, where are you? So anxious about you. Hope to have good news soon. You can trust me.—Your friend, Nell.

Paragraph in the *Globe*:

There is still no news of the missing young lady. We understand that, after leaving home on Thursday, she called to see a friend living in Steyne Mansions, but left at about five o'clock, and has not been seen since. She is of medium height and extremely prepossessing appearance, and was dressed in a tailor-made tweed suit, with a brown velvet hat and sable boa.

Extract from the *Daily Mail*:

We have ascertained that Miss Maisie Adeane, the young actress, who has been missing since Thursday, called that afternoon at Steyne Mansions to see Miss Harmar, a young lady journalist, who is living there in a flat alone. Miss Harmar asked Miss Adeane to take a MS. for her to the editor of the *Rotten Row Magazine*, and it is presumed that she did so, as a young lady, answering to her description, called at the *Magazine* office and asked to see the editor. As the editor was not in, she was shown up to the secretary's room, where Mr. Forbes saw her, and took the MS from her. From that moment there is no trace of her movements. We understand that she resided with her father at 13, Hope Gardens, but that she was not very happy in her home life. Her own mother is dead, and Mr. Adeane has married again, and has two step-daughters also living with him. Miss Harmar states that Miss Adeane seemed to be particularly depressed, and spoke of the difficulty of succeeding in her profession, her *rôle* in "The Only Girl" being a very small one. The gravest apprehensions are therefore entertained as to her safety by her friends and relations.

The *Star*, fifth edition:

NEWS OF THE MISSING LADY.

A document of a most extraordinary description has been picked up this afternoon and handed in to the Marylebone Police Station. The police entertain little doubt that it is a communication from Miss Adeane, the lady who has now been lost for four days, and expect that this important clue will enable them to trace her whereabouts. It is written on a torn piece of foolscap paper, and, as it was found in the middle of the road, was probably dropped from the window of a carriage. It runs as follows:

"I implore whoever may find this paper to take it at once to my father—or to the nearest police station. I do not know how long a time has elapsed since I was taken prisoner, but it seems like weeks. I was walking in Merton Street when suddenly a brougham stopped close to me, and a gentleman got out and asked me to come to the assistance of a lady who was fainting in the carriage. I hastened to the door, and was about to enter, when I felt myself lifted in, and something thrown round my head so that I could not scream, or hardly breathe. The brougham

Maisie turned eagerly towards her.

instantly went on at a gallop, and I was so frightened that I lost consciousness and did not regain my senses till I found myself in a padded room, with only one small grated window. I do not know where I am, nor how long I have been here; and I believe that I am continually placed under mesmeric influence. I wake as from a trance, and, though I have no recollection of what has happened to me, I find that I am often in a different room, though it is always of the same description, like a prison. Food is placed in it, but I do not know when or how, as I have never seen or spoken to anyone. One day a voice came to me from the wall, and I recognised it as the one that asked me to come and assist the lady. On this occasion, it said that if I would promise to submit to the life arranged for me I should have more liberty, and should eventually be allowed to rejoin my friends, but otherwise I should be kept always under control both mentally and bodily, and any attempt to escape would be useless, as the influence now established over me could recall me at any time. I am going to try to feign sleep, or unconsciousness, and in some way to drop this, as I——"

Here the document abruptly ends; and it is concluded that the writer was interrupted, but was able to conceal the paper, and to succeed in her project.

The police hope that it will be of great assistance to put them on her track.

The *Daily Mail*:

FOUND AT LAST.

Miss Maisie Adeane, the lady who has now been missing for a week, has reappeared. She arrived at Miss Harmar's flat at about ten o'clock last night, and our special correspondent is to have an interview with her early this morning, when it is hoped the mystery will be solved.

• • • • • • • •

FINALE.

"Well, Maisie, are you glad your captivity is over, and that you can have your liberty back after all these dull, dreary days?"

Nell, with a flushed, triumphant face, was standing inside the door of the bedroom in the little flat, and Maisie, who had been looking dejectedly out of the window, turned eagerly and sprang towards her.

"And how about your promise, Nell?" she said. "I have kept mine—have you failed in yours?"

"Your name is made," replied Miss Harmar, speaking slowly and deliberately. "Steady, Maisie, and pull yourself together. I want you to read all these through carefully," she tapped a bundle of newspaper cuttings in her hand, "and then you will understand where you are. There will be half-a-dozen reporters to see you in a few minutes; the *Daily Mail* man was here late last night, and I told him you could positively see no one before ten o'clock."

"But what do you want me to do—what can I say?" asked Maisie, lifting a bewildered face from a hasty scrutiny of one or two paragraphs.

"Just say the truth," replied Nell, "that to the best of your belief nothing extraordinary has happened to you at all—that your life has been a blank to you from the afternoon a week ago, when you came to see me, up to last night, and that you can recollect nothing except the fact of being here. They will probably decide that you have been hypnotised into forgetfulness. If they bring a certain document with them and ask you if it is in your handwriting you can say 'Yes,' but that you have no remembrance of the experience it relates. You little thought when I asked you to scribble down a chapter of my last romance that it was going to be taken out and dropped as a hostage to fortune in the muddy road!"

"Oh, Nell," said Maisie, "you take my breath away—how did you dare?"

"A messenger has already brought a note from the manager," continued Miss Harmar, "asking you to be sure to appear at the theatre to-night, and if possible learn the accompanying song, written for the occasion, which is to be interpolated on your entrance. He evidently thinks that the reappearance of Miss Maisie Adeane in her original part will be a draw. I confidently predict that before twenty-four hours have passed you will have offers from more than one manager to take a leading part in their next productions. It was worth a week's captivity under my durance vile, wasn't it, and I think we have managed it very cleverly. Don't forget your plodding friend, Maisie, when you are at the top of the tree. A turn for romance isn't a bad thing sometimes as a stepping-stone to something more substantial. Hark! there's the bell, the Philistines are upon us—be discreet—that's all I ask of you now."

"Don't be afraid," said Maisie, "I have my chance and I am going to take it, and I'll never forget who gave it to me. Give me the song, Nell—it shall not be a failure, I promise you. If you don't join me at the top of the tree before very long it won't be my fault. Come along, you arch conspirator, and see me through it."

Some have Greatness thrust upon them.

THE whole of London was enveloped in the murky, opaque twilight of a yellow fog; an atmosphere which monopolised the powers of seeing, tasting, feeling—and deadened that of hearing; obliterating the sensations of identity and locality. In the large thoroughfares, the light from street lamps and passing vehicles, assisted by illuminations in shop windows, dispersed some of the obscurity, and made scattered oases of semi-brightness.

But in the smaller streets and byways, notably in a secluded alley near Tottenham Court Road, burdened with the name of Mark's Hole and Corner, the darkness was so concentrated, so heavily dense, that it seemed as though some demon of eternal night had descended on the city and rested brooding there, with pendant, clammy, vampire-like wings, from whose impalpable yet stifling folds extrication was impossible. The houses, dilapidated and sodden, might have been empty, so devoid were they of all vitality of light and sound. The lower floors, used chiefly as store rooms for a mass of heterogeneous lumber by day, swarm at night with a drifting colony of lodgers, indescribable loafers of all conditions, who prefer to spend their pence in the acquisition of a six-foot portion in this harbour of refuge, than to take their fitful repose, free of rent, under an archway or on a bench in the open air.

But in the higher storeys, a few families, possessed of more dependable occupations, and able to pay their rent from week to week, live and toil, accepting, with a philosophy born of undeviating misfortune, the addition to their work and its unprofitableness that the absence of daylight must bring. In a room at the very top, where the light of one small lamp seemed to emphasise the surrounding gloom, a young woman sat, methodically working buttonholes in linen cuffs, a little heap of which lay on a clean newspaper at her feet.

She was tired, and she was cold, and she was hungry; but it did not occur to her to think that she was either, and her reflections were entirely occupied with wondering at which of his three favourite resorts her husband had been malingering for the last two days, and whether, if she finished the cuffs in time to take them to the shop and get payment for them, it would be worth while to prepare a little supper for him, and then hunt him out from his temporary retirement.

"Is anything worth while?" she was asking herself wearily. "Could anything in the world matter to such as they? What difference would it make if they did manage to creep up a little higher in their social scale, or if, as was far more probable, they sank lower, lower still, and reached the depth—an unspeakable one to her country-born notions—of those lodgers below, the riff-raff of a decadent population?"

She decided mentally that their case was hopeless. Nothing could cure her husband's love of idleness and drink; she had already tried every possible means; first with sanguine belief, later with ever-faltering hope—finally with the dogged persistence of despair. And every month—every week—every day—he succumbed more completely and became more deeply submerged in a resistless tide of ruin and oblivion.

She sighed, as the sound of a distant chime told her that it was already two o'clock, and, going towards the window, tried to peer down into the court and see if there was any sign of the fog lifting.

There was none; the wings of the Spirit of Darkness still rested heavily, silently. Outside the court, in the narrow street that was its sole approach, a cab slowly loomed into sight beneath the one dim flicker of gas, and the driver descended, detached one of his lamps, and, leading his horse carefully, threw the rays here and there, searching for some guidance.

Finally, in response to an impatient question from his fare, he came to a standstill.

"It ought to be about here," he said, "but I can't see no opening."

The street was a *cul-de-sac*, and there appeared to be no resource but to turn, or if that was impossible, to back out by the way they had come.

"Half-a-minute," said the cabman, "here's someone coming."

A faltering, uncertain step approached, and a tall figure, emerging suddenly from the darkness, collided with the cabman, and tumbled in an indistinguishable heap on the pavement.

"Hold up," said the cabman, amazed at this unlooked for collapse; then, stooping and, turning his lamp on the huddled figure, "he's drunk, sir," he said. "I thought he went down pretty easy."

"Shake him up," said the impatient voice from the cab again, "and ask him where the dickens Mark's Hole and Corner is."

The figure raised its head. "I'm not drunk," it said, and, though the voice belied its assertion, the accent was strangely refined, and had the nameless stamp that comes from gentle birth, and is in some cases never eradicated.

"Get up, then," said the taller of the two men who now descended from the cab, "and tell us, if you can, where you are. If you want to earn a shilling you will show us the way to Mark's Hole and Corner."

The man staggered to his feet, and, without further attempt at reply, made a few desultory strides, which apparently led him straight into the wall of the house.

The two men stopped, but the cabman, throwing the light in the direction of their pilot, revealed that there was a low archway running right through one of the houses, and that the man lurching ahead was looking back and signalling to them to come on.

"Is this it, cabby?" said the taller man, "a nice attractive place it looks. It's like the nethermost Hades. Go on ahead with the light—no—here, give it to me and go back to your horse."

"Supposing we are here on a fool's errand," remarked the elder and shorter man. "We should have done better to postpone it, Elton. After all, it's like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay."

"With the chance of its being the wrong needle, too," replied Elton gaily. "I had a fancy, uncle, to follow this trail out to-day, and we seem near the end of our quest now—the bitter end."

They had emerged from the archway, and the indistinct form of their guide was leaning up against the wall, with an unspoken question in his dissipated but still handsome face. Ragged and debased looking as he seemed in the uncertain hazy pathway of light directed on him by Elton, there was yet something of ease in his bearing that separated him from the herd of street cadgers whose garb he wore.

"Look here," said Elton, touching his arm lightly with the point of his umbrella, "if this is the Hole and Corner you've earned your shilling. Earn another and tell us which house a man called Brandreth lives in."

The expression in the man's dull eyes changed slightly, and he pulled himself together again, and began to cross the court.

The three followed him, and only paused when he vanished in the embrasure of a tumble-down doorway leading apparently into a disused warehouse.

"Better give it up, Elton," said the old man. "I confess I don't care for our surroundings and this man."

But the man had returned and was confronting him.

"Step up," he said, with a sort of authority. "If you want Brandreth he lives on the top floor."

"Let's go through with it," said Elton, "it promises to be more interesting than some of our other runs, uncle; and I firmly believe we have got our fox this time."

The man who was preceding them up the rickety stairs stopped abruptly and seemed about to speak, but changed his mind, and continued his upward progress.

When they reached the top, he opened a door, and, waiting for them to pass in, closed it after them immediately; then, throwing himself defiantly into a chair: "Now then, what do you want?" he said; "I'm Brandreth, and here's Mrs. Brandreth. You can say what you have to say to her."

His voice was still thick and uneven, but a certain sobriety had come into it since he first spoke.

The young woman, dropping her wristbands and sweeping them up lightly in the newspaper, had risen hurriedly at their entrance, and with a quick involuntary movement of one hand to her heart, stood gazing first at her husband and then at the unexpected visitors.

"What is it?" she said breathlessly. "I hope my husband——"

"Don't apologise, Meg," broke in Brandreth roughly; "I've nothing to fear from any man—it's their place to give an explanation."

Meg glanced from him to them, and, encountering the earnest gaze that Elton had fixed on her from the moment of entering, shrank back.

Experience had taught her that a look of interest from a man, and especially if he was her superior, generally meant an admiration that expressed itself disagreeably, and was best put aside.

But Elton continued his grave scrutiny. He had seen at the first glance, poorly dressed and care-worn looking as she was, that her beauty was remarkable. The chestnut hair, rolled up in a loose, untidy knot, was such as many a society beauty would have envied in its rippling, wavy profusion; the delicately chiseled features, pale and grey as they were from weariness and privation, were too perfect in their contour to have yet lost their loveliness; the soft dark eyes, eloquent of tears and watching, retained the glory that had made her chief attraction to Brandreth when he married her; and the lips, to which smiles had for so long been strange and difficult, were yet beautiful in their tremulous sweetness

The figure raised its head

The thought occurred to Elton, who delighted in a study of life and human nature, of the incongruity of this woman's face with her surroundings, and in his imagination he could picture her dressed in silk and lace, with a tiara of jewels on her shapely head, and all the accessories that wealth and high rank could give her.

"A farmer's daughter, we are told," he was murmuring to himself, "yet Brandreth couldn't have done better even if he had known. There is character and adaptation as well as beauty in this woman, and she will take the place that should be hers."

Then, turning to the husband, he said: "Will you permit me to present to you my uncle, Mr. Hobart, head of the firm of Hobart, Locke & Co.? I am Elton Locke, the junior partner; and I am conducting this particular piece of business for the firm. Indeed, I may say I have been giving up the whole of my time to it for the last three years. You are aware, probably, that we have been advertising in the newspapers for a long time past for a man of the name of Brandreth?"

"Not I," said Mr. Brandreth. "May I ask why you take this kind interest in a man of then ame of Brandreth?"

There was a gleam of amusement in Elton's eyes. "It is entirely for our own benefit, I confess," he said; "we are owed now a large sum of money from an estate to which the heir is missing, and until he is found we are unable to get a settlement. But, if we can find the Mr. Brandreth we are in search of, it will be to his own very great advantage. Will you allow me, therefore, to ask you some questions?"

Receiving no answer, the young lawyer took out a packet of papers from his pocket, and, glancing round for a chair, handed it to his uncle, and gravely asked Mrs. Brandreth's permission to seat himself on the table.

"In the first place, your Christian names," he said

"Lionel Talbot Ponsonby," answered Brandreth. His voice was a trifle firmer, and he was sitting more erect in his chair.

"Your mother's and father's Christian names," continued Elton, "date of their marriage and deaths."

Brandreth got up slowly, and, steadying himself against the wall, felt in his pocket for some keys, which he handed to his wife.

"Get those papers of mine out of the box, Meg," he said, "and give them to Mr. Locke."

She looked at him in surprise.

There was a new accent in his voice—a sort of repression; and his manner had changed from the sullen defiance that was usual to him; he seemed to bear himself towards these strangers as though he were their equal. She fetched the papers. Elton watching her with growing interest. She was tall and graceful; her movements pleased his critical eye.

He rose and took the papers from her with a deferential bow.

"Certificate of marriage between Phœbe Leroy and Philip Lancaster Brandreth at Illinois City; certificate of his death—and of her second marriage—and death. These are apparently just what we want," he looked up at his uncle. Then, turning towards Mr. Brandreth, "it was your mother's second marriage that caused all our difficulties," he said, "we could not trace her at all until quite lately. We have had about five hundred applicants, all claiming to be the missing heir, but all failed to establish their claims. I should think you are the only man left in the world called Brandreth who has not applied to us. There seems to be no doubt that you are the one we require."

Mr. Brandreth moved towards him.

"What is it all about?" he said. "I knew my father was a gentleman, but nothing more. Is he the heir you speak of—and what is the property?"

He was standing quite steadily now; and his voice was distinct.

"Your father was son of the Honble. Lionel Brandreth, and nephew to Baron Winstanley of Stanley, who died twenty years ago, and was succeeded by his three sons one after the other. They all died without issue, and your father was the next heir. At his death, of which"—he tapped the papers in his hand—"you have the certificate, you succeed. There will, of course, be formalities to be gone through before your claim is legally established, but I have the chain of evidence already complete, and these were the missing links—when will it be convenient for you to call at our office, and make the necessary arrangements, my lord?"

He glanced, as he spoke the last words, towards Mrs. Brandreth. She was deadly pale, and was looking at her husband with a sort of terrified apprehension He took her hand for an instant—and then put her gently aside.

"I am not," he said slowly, and with a new dignity, "in a condition as regards dress, and in other ways, to come to your office; but perhaps——"

"We shall be very pleased," interposed Mr. Hobart, "to make an immediate advance to you, my lord, if you wish. You would no doubt like to leave this," he looked round at the bare, squalid room, "as soon as possible."

"I should like to leave it at once," was the reply given with decision. "If it is convenient to you we will go to your office now, my wife and I—and I should be glad of an advance in order to get some clothing suitable for going to a small, quiet hotel. Meg, will you get ready, dear?"

The surprise with which she looked at him was shared by Elton. The dishevelled, tipsy loafer who had led the way into Mark's Hole and Corner was transformed by the accident of an overwhelming piece of good fortune as though the wand of a magician had touched him. The disgrace of his former condition seemed to have fallen from him as a garment, and, though his rags were still there, he was a new man in spite of them.

She put on her bonnet and shawl with trembling hands; but for her amazement she would have burst into tears; and then she turned and carefully folded the wristbands at which she had been working.

"These must go back," she said simply, "even if I do not finish them." Her husband smiled faintly.

"Leave them, Meg," he said, "we will send someone for them to-morrow. If you will go first with the lamp," he added, turning to the other two, "we will lock the door and follow."

The fog had lifted a little when they emerged into the court, and turned into a pale grey mist, through which they walked in silence to the cab.

Elton opened the door and waited for Meg.

She was moving as one in a dream, clinging to her husband's arm for support, and he, standing, where before he had fallen helplessly on the pavement, was telling her in a low voice to keep up for his sake.

What a world of difference lay between the entrance to Mark's Hole and Corner and the exit!

Elton held out his hand to assist her into the cab.

"May I assist you, Lady Winstanley?" he said.

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By J. Malcolm Fraser.

"POSSIBLE? of course it is; not only is it possible, but it is also distinctly probable. In my opinion, though I *may* be biased, it is one of the most feasible explanations that has ever been formulated. It sounds very mythical and pretty to say that the earth's centre is merely a molten mass, but how long could such a state of things last? Surely with this unceasing fire burning in the centre of a comparatively thin globe, the outer crust would soon wear out, and allow the so-called 'molten mass' to burst upon limitless space. No, say what you will, the theory which I advance is decidedly the more plausible of the two."

"I dare say it is, old chap, but as a matter of fact I can't quite follow out your theory. You must remember that I am only one of those poor mortals who are as ignorant of scientific matters as they are of Sanscrit. Your arguments, in short, muddle me more by their technicalities than they enlighten me by their wisdom. Try and explain your theory in plain English, there's a good fellow."

"'Ignorance of the law excuseth no man.' As to *my* theory, I can hardly lay claim to its being mine, for no less a person than Athanasius Kircher, the German scientist, advanced the same thesis after a somewhat protracted study in 1660—over a couple of centuries ago.

"To be concise, however, I agree with him in his work upon the Malström, entitled 'The Umbilicus Maris,' and maintain that our large whirlpools are nothing more or less than entrances to the bowels of the earth. In other words, I maintain that a constant stream of cold water flows through the centre of this globe and thus the all-consuming heat which will eventually destroy the land is partially held in check.

"The question remains as to what becomes of the water when it has reached its destination. This is easily answered on the supposition that, when it has become heated, it again returns to the surface by means of the channels which may be found in the beds of our oceans and seas. The main exit, according to my calculations, should lie in the Gulf of Florida, and in substantiation of this, I may refer you to the Gulf Stream, by which beautiful dispensation of Nature half Europe is warmed. Of course there are innumerable minor exits, as the geysers of Iceland, America, and elsewhere bear witness.

"That this flow of water varies, I grant you. Take, for instance, the case of the Malström itself. As is well known, this pool is sometimes as placid as a mill-pond, but this only occurs when Mother Earth has, for the time being, satiated herself with her cooling draught. To be sure of the varying flow, one has only to watch the change in temperature at the foot of a deep coal-mine."

"It certainly sounds very feasible; but you don't mean to say that you are prepared to explore the Malström? So far as I can see, that is the only course by which your theory can be proved. What do you intend to do, anyway?"

"That, as you know, has worried me for the last twenty years. You have often wished to see my workshop, but I have always postponed your visit until such a time as the fruits of my labours should be ripe. Come, and you shall see."

I rose and followed. We, that is to say, Professor G. Van Praagh and I, had been sitting in his study preparatory to the evening smoke, when the conversation turned upon the subject of the earth's internal heat and consequent results. The Professor had advanced a somewhat startling theory, with the result that the above conversation had been embarked upon.

For the last five years I had been one of Van Praagh's greatest friends—so far as friends went with him—for an indefinable bond of superiority seemed to effectively separate our respective minds. He was an odd mixture, partly generous, partly mean, and wholly self-enthusiastic. He possessed, moreover, that happy gift of animal magnetism, and would, after five minutes' conversation, not only convince the most stubborn sceptic, but would also make a perverse nature as enthusiastic as he himself in the pursuit of some palpably absurd undertaking.

To all appearances the Professor, or George, as he insisted on my calling him, possessed a long and decidedly clever face, which, upon close inspection, proved to be suffused with a delicate flush. His eyes and nose proclaimed him to be of Jewish extraction. Thinly built, but sinewy in the extreme, with a mass of iron-grey hair and long, writhing fingers that betokened both nervousness and mental activity, he looked anything between thirty and forty-five. His brain was incapable of fatigue, while his thoughts flashed with greater rapidity through his mind than his tongue was capable of giving utterance to. It was curious to note with what unison both his actions and thoughts operated, while his retarded speech would often cause the most sensible remark to become absurd. In short, his conversation gave one the idea of a man talking aloud to himself.

When once he got into the swing of an argument, however, he could be as lucid and concise as any ordinary mortal. Such was the case as he led the way to his workshop.

"There," he said, as he pushed open the swing-door, "there lies the means by which I can prove my theory, or——"

"Or?" I queried, glancing at him with a quizzical smile.

"Or? well—fail," he answered. "But no, that is impossible. There is the model of the boat in which I intend to make my exploration, and when my ship proper is built, I will prove to the world that I am right, and will thus be in a position to snap my fingers at those self-styled scientists who so often have insulted me."

The baleful gleam, which till now had been flashing in George's eyes, changed suddenly to the light of enthusiasm as he proceeded to explain his invention.

"You will notice that the boat itself is shaped like a fish, the tail of which in this case comprises the rudder. It consists, moreover, of an inner and an outer casing, around which a helix completes three, or, to be more correct, 2.8 turns. Now the outer casing, which is two-thirds of the boat's length and to which this helix is attached, is constructed so that it can be made to revolve by powerful machinery of which I alone hold the patents. Even a person with quite an elementary knowledge of marine matters will grasp the immense advantages of this novel method of navigation; not only will the *Plongeur*, as I call her, make the phenomenal speed of sixty miles an hour on the surface of the water, but my calculations and tests show that under water she will, owing to a greater decrease of friction than has hitherto been obtained, *screw* her way at no fewer than a hundred and twenty miles an hour. The interior is, of course, perfectly stable, for it is composed of the inner casing fixed to the extreme ends upon which the outer casing revolves. Being weighted below it thus retains a perpendicular position. The machinery, cabins, and other accommodation will, of course, be situated in this inner casing.

"As I mean to make for the Malström whirlpool and enter it *head downwards*, I shall have a small padded room constructed in the stern in which to remain while the force of the stream, to the centre of the earth, rocks and pitches me about. This room will be fitted solely with the fixings with which, if necessary, I may check, start, and generally control the electrical plant."

"How are you going to manage about the breathing apparatus?" I inquired. "So far as I know the longest time that it is possible to remain without natural air is by using the Goubet *procédé*. But even this will only keep a person alive for thirty-five hours without being recharged. Surely your trip will extend over a week, will it not?"

"Most assuredly. The diameter of the earth is calculated at 7,901 miles, so that going at top speed it will take me at least thirty-two hours to reach only the centre of this globe—which is allowing absolutely nothing for slowing down or deviations in the route. No, no, my device is better than Monsieur Goubet's; the only recharging that it needs may be easily extracted from the sea itself. Practically speaking, therefore, I need never return to God's air again. As a matter of fact, I shall not go at top speed at all—the force of the stream proving an excellent motor. I shall, to a certain extent, let it carry me to my goal. The helices are capable of being reversed, so that in descending I shall have the advantage of being able to check the vessel and thus remain suspended in the torrent."

"But surely you do not think that the water flows through the earth of its own accord? How do you account for the laws of gravitation? The water may flow into the centre of the earth, I grant you, but how, when it has reached the centre, is it again going to rise to the surface with gravitation at its very strongest holding it back? The descending waters from the Malström will, of course, hurtle downwards with ever increasing velocity, but as to its again rising, I am, I confess, somewhat sceptical."

"Why should it not rise even in view of the laws of gravitation in the same way as hot water circulates throughout the whole of a house?"

And thus he rattled far on into the night until my head was a whirl of facts, figures and fancies. Twice he nearly convinced me and persuaded me to join him on his expedition; twice when on the point of acquiescing, we were interrupted and my cautious nature again had time to re-assert itself—and therefore I refused.

Early the next morning he left London to see after the building of his ship, and for six months I heard nothing of him until one day a letter reached me written in his usual boisterous mood which ended with:

Look here, old fellow, I've got through this building business three months sooner than I expected. Yesterday we went on a trial trip, sailing down the Clyde and so out to sea. She's a perfect dandy and behaved splendidly throughout the whole trial. We were all astonished—why, at a pinch she will do her hundred and thirty miles an hour easily. Old Rowley, the builder, declares her to be a marvel. He'd give his soul to know what I used in charging the batteries, but as I cannot patent that I shall keep it secret—jolly good stuff it is, too—a barrel full of chemicals, and I've got enough motive power to keep the old boat going at top speed for a month. How's that for economy of fuel, eh? Wait till I get back again, I'll send my Lords of the Admiralty stark staring mad to beg, borrow, or steal my secret. In ten days I shall be ready to *descend* and not *ascend* to "glory." Shall expect you up here on Monday to help me with the final preparations and also to see the start of

Yours sincerely,
George.

There is little need for me to describe our meeting and the subsequent busy days preparatory to his departure, so that I shall endeavour to give as concisely as possible the course of after events.

Within a week of my receiving his letter, therefore, I stood upon the quay and watched him being screwed down into his curious craft. After a delay of some minutes I saw his face peering at me through the thick glass of the conning-tower, as with a wave of his hand, he gently set the ponderous machinery in motion and glided from his moorings.

The motion was scarcely perceptible as a gigantic section of the helix arose from the water, and, coiling itself like some huge snake around the boat, went writhing and twisting towards the bow, followed by sections without number, each and all giving renewed impetus to the strange form. His speed increased and as he gradually left the crowded river behind him, the boat seemed to flash along like a silvery ray of light enveloped in a seething mass of foam. And there I watched until the glistening speck vanished from the horizon, when with a great foreboding

in my mind, I turned my back upon the Professor who had thus set forth, quite alone, to navigate his "central axis canal," and prove to the world that *his* theory was correct, and that with all their learning the eminent *savants* of the day were far less wise than Athanasius Kirscher, who had lived two hundred years before them.

* * * * * *

Again six months passed, during which nothing was heard of George. The newspapers had only taken a languid interest in his expedition, partly because he had not wished his enterprise to become public property, and partly because there were plenty of other more exciting matters with which the great dailies were able to fill their columns.

Now, however, a slack season in the journalistic world had commenced, and an American correspondent on the look-out for sensational matter for his New York editor bethought himself of the explorer. Then for the first time the public raised itself into a state of expectation on reading the headlines THE DEVIL DISTURBED IN HIS LAIR—DOES PURGATORY LIE IN THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH? and other equally ridiculous insinuatory squibs which, as is usual with the American newspapers, bore not the slightest reference to the letter-press below.

In point of fact nothing whatever had been heard of my friend, so that there was no possibility of there being any fresh news on the subject. Give an American reporter an idea, however, and he will write on and on, drawing upon his imagination and repeating himself times without number until the required columns have been filled.

Gradually these "jingo" descriptions were dropped as fresh war scares came along to take their place, and it was only a few days after this senseless farago had appeared that my curiosity was aroused by the following paragraph in the *Times*:

(REUTER'S TELEGRAM) "The watch of the steamship *Lincoln*, trading between Key West and Vera Cruz, while crossing the Gulf of Florida yesterday sighted a bladder floating loose upon the water. The captain's curiosity was aroused, with the result that a boat was put out to pick it up. Upon opening the bladder a packet was found addressed to Mr. Howard Medway. The captain decided not to open the packet, and it will in due course be forwarded to the person to whom it is addressed."

In short, the name it bore was my own, as also was the address. From whom a packet addressed to me and found in the Gulf of Florida could be, I had not the slightest idea; could it be possible that George had met with an accident and had thus endeavoured to communicate with me in the same way that a drowning man would have done?

The following week brought me the packet inclosed with a note from the captain, and my worst fears were confirmed.

I need not comment upon this, the last letter of my dying—or, by this time, dead—friend, but give it to my readers as it reached me

* * * * * *

"Nothing, my dearest old friend, can exceed the despondency to which my mind has fallen at this, the present time of writing. Bound, fettered and enmeshed, not literally but metaphorically; now a willing slave—willing to stay, willing to do, willing to die—now cursing the hour of my birth and wishing for the time of deliverance that I know must be at hand.

"I can imagine the look of astonishment upon your face when, if ever, you read these opening lines. 'What does it all mean?' I can hear you say, as a smile, credulous of my sanity, crosses your face. But as I hope for future deliverance, that which I am about to relate is true—I swear it!

"That I have not long to live, I repeat, so that it is with haste that I pick up my pen and rapidly sketch the course of events which it has pleased fortune to take since last we met.

"Where shall I commence? At the beginning! Yes, the beginning, horrible though it was, conceals worse in its train.

"I left you, old friend, standing upon the dock wishing me luck, and as I made my way straight for the coast of Norway, I somehow, for the first time, felt a strange foreboding that I should never see you again. *Ché sara, sara*—what must be, *must be*

"I need not bore you with the monotony of my short trip above earth, but will proceed to the more extraordinary part of my journey. As I reached the Malström, my disappointment was intense—the vast expanse of water lay unruffled save for the ripples caused by a momentary puff of wind, but as I hove to and waited the hitherto motionless bed became seamed and scarred by hundreds of conflicting channels. The angered waters burst suddenly into frenzied convulsions, twisting and writhing in innumerable vortices, all gyrating and whirling with the rapidity that can only be assumed by water which descends to a precipitous depth.

"Each fresh form was the signal for the next. Subsidiary vortices rushed together and formed the germ of one more large, more vast, more magnificent than the last. Suddenly, and with the precision of forethought, this chaotic mass assumed a distinct and definite shape. A circle over a mile in diameter formed upon the edge of the seething waters, whose limits were comprised by a broad belt of fiery spray.

"Round and round spun the interior of this gigantic circle, until a terrific funnel was made. The interior, so far as human eyes could see, was a smooth wall of jet-black water inclined to the horizon at an angle of [illegible] degrees. Into this I was grasped and gradually whirled with ever-increasing pace and decreasing circles, until at last, giddy and bruised, I became [illegible] to the pool's appalling cry—half shriek, half roar, such as even the [illegible] could not wring from human breast.

"How long I remained in this state I cannot tell. The padded room in which I lay was in its normal state, and I was surprised to feel that the boat had assumed an angle of no more than sixty degrees. It was evident, therefore, that the earth's shaft did not drop perpendicularly to the centre. I decided to crawl to the window, which, as you are aware, was specially made of toughened plate glass, and see what there was to be seen. A steady roar seemed to surround me and ever and anon a white fleck of foam bubbled against the side and passed on. I turned out the lights and endeavoured to allow my eyes to grow accustomed to their surroundings.

"Still everything remained a velvety black, so I decided to turn on the search-light. Gradually, under the snow-white rays, the semi luminous water assumed a greenish hue, and I could discern to dim grey shapes of innumerable fishes that had evidently, like myself, been sucked in by the torrent. There was no need to use the *Plongeur's* motive power, for the rushing waters carried me on and on at a speed far excelling my poor hundred and twenty miles an hour. Nothing remained, therefore, but to wait.

"Little need is there to describe my journey down, which, though monotonous in description, was fraught with peril and excitement for me. One incident only will I relate, which may possibly interest you. You remember I mentioned that I would endeavour to reverse the motions of my boat, and thus stay her speed in the midst of the torrent and examine my surroundings. As well endeavour to bridle a cyclone.

"I decided to attempt the feat, however, and from the padded room I started the machinery with the reverse action. A sudden check was the result, and as I put on full speed astern, the rate of the *Plongeur* was materially diminished. I then made my way to the conning-tower, and was astonished at the sudden heat which was momentarily gaining in strength. Rushing past the windows was a seething black mass of water foaming and roaring as if in the endeavour to overwhelm me. I placed my fingers upon the glass—it was burning hot.

"It then occurred to me that the friction of the water against the steel threatened to generate a heat sufficient to crack the window and let that cruel mill-stream in upon me. Quickly I crawled back and switched off the resisting powers as a thunderous crash shook the boat from end to end. Again I felt my doom was fixed—the glass broken. The suspense was awful as I waited, fully expecting to be submerged by the incoming waters, but no, nothing happened and I summed up the courage to creep forth and inspect.

"The heat had greatly decreased, and to my surprise the window was still intact, but instead of the water rushing past the boat the boat was rushing past the water, and at the same time was rising in a horizontal position, as if to the surface of some sea. Up, up, we rose until the *Plongeur* came to a standstill.

"Again I strained my eyes in every direction, but only to find myself floating upon a vast lake enveloped in a silvery-grey mist. It was then that I discovered the cause of that awful crash. Apparently I had descended from the earth's surface through some gigantic shaft which found a terminus in this underground lake. Shooting through the shaft with a terrific velocity, I had glanced past a rock, the contact of which had torn a ragged piece out of the *Plongeur's* helix; and descending to unknown depths until my speed had abated, the boat had risen to the surface. Had I struck full upon the rock, I should have been crushed into a shapeless mass, and thus have been spared all further pain.

"The machinery had escaped injury, and even with the battered helix I was able to move at quite a respectable rate.

"For two whole hours I steamed—metaphorically speaking—at forty knots an hour, until at last the hazy mist slightly lifting exposed the low-lying land, covered with innumerable figures which ever and anon raised themselves on what appeared to be their forelegs, and gave vent to deep-toned bellows of relief.

"The lake gradually rose, and as I watched, straining my eyes to catch a glimpse of these strange beasts—or people were they?—the mist grew thicker and thicker, and the bellows louder, more frequent, and more joyous

"A new dread seemed to seize me as these awful sounds floated over the dark and noisome waters. Here was I alone in a strange land among strange and maybe savage beasts or people, I knew not which, with, so far as I could see, no mode of escape.

"The temperature throughout the whole journey had been well-nigh intolerable, but now I felt as though my very life was oozing from my perspiring pores, so oppressive was the heat. Round and round whirled my dizzy brain, dizzy with the intense heat, until fearing that my senses would depart, I rushed to the manhole and unscrewed the hermetically sealed cap. In came the curling mist accompanied by the screams from the shore borne upon the wings of an air so hot that it seemed to blast my very skin with its fevered touch Thrusting the cap once more into place I dimly remember endeavouring to screw it tight—and then I fainted."

* * * * * *

My poor friend flung himself upon the cap and sought to pull it to.

Here my poor friend begins to ramble as though the very thoughts of his sufferings were painful to him For the greater part, the rest of his letter is disjointed, and one or two paragraphs meaningless. In some instances, even, his remarks merely consist of a string of vowels and consonants indiscriminately mixed, as though he were endeavouring to convey to me the sounds of a strange and unknown language with English characters. I have made out, however, a sort of short history of after events from this seemingly hopeless jumble which now and again takes the form of his own words when sanity was upon him

It seems as though on recovering from his swoon, he found himself no longer floating on the lake, but, with his ship, he had been drawn up on to the dry land How this had been accomplished he does not pretend to explain, but he is certain that the engines had never moved since he had checked them, and that he himself was in no way instrumental in this phenomenon.

His returning senses were again saluted with that awful roar—this roar seems to have been the constant source of his terror—and he could distinctly hear the sound of flopping bodies moving and scratching upon the top of the boat Crawling slowly towards the manhole, he suddenly cowered back with a shriek of fear. The cap of the hole had been loosened, and between the cracks dozens of shining claws, covered with thick, dry scales of skin, grueesome caricatures of human hands, writhed and twisted in their endeavour to loosen still more the already slack nuts and bolts. Now and again two or three of these claws would be withdrawn, and in their stead a pair of long grey eyes, fiendish in their intensity, would appear, flashing upon him a malignant glitter. Once more these eyes, each the very incarnation of malice, would disappear, as with a snarl of disappointment, the claw-like hands would again crawl through the intervening crack, tearing and snatching at the heavy bolts

Mad with fear and desperation, my poor friend flung himself upon the cap and sought to pull it to. Down upon these cruel fingers came the steel, crushing the bony wrists of their owners. One of the writhing hands caught his thumb and imprisoned it like a vice, bruising and lacerating the flesh till, with a cry of pain, he fell upon the ground. Feeling the weight lifted, the hands were immediately withdrawn, so George seized the opportunity to close the hole securely. Once again he felt comparatively safe, but for the thought that as these men or beasts had already once opened the trap, they might do so again. He was reassured, however, for upon a moment's consideration, he remembered that before fainting from the heat he was

trying to relock the manhole, and must have swooned before his efforts were completed. Albeit he was by no means comfortable, he felt at least safe for the time being.

The electric light he dared not keep alight for fear of again attracting the attention of these, the denizens of an unknown land; nor dare he stay in the rooms which contained windows, for the framework was constantly blocked by faces, ghastly in their semi-human likeness.

The general appearance of these faces, I gather, was long and thin, with eyes of tremendous length, hollow, sunken cheeks, and high, prominent cheek-bones; the mouth, which resembled that of a fish, stretched over the whole width of the face,

"Down the pathway came two gigantic specimens of this mysterious tribe, bearing upon their shoulders the most beautiful type of womanhood."

and drooped at the corners, giving a look of hungry wickedness to the features, and making the nose, already prominent and aquiline, stand out to a point bordering on the ridiculous. The skin, wrinkled and cracked as it was, completed with the hair, hanging in damp coils around the head, the most villainous type of bestial cruelty that can possibly be conceived even by the most powerful of imaginations. Such, then, was the description given me of the vision that constantly intruded itself upon his sight.

When, later on, they forsook their point of vantage at the window, and he hoped they had gone for ever, he peered out into the fog and saw a sight that, even after the perils he had already undergone, struck a greater terror into his heart than any other thing that had passed before.

He lay in his boat upon the edge of a lake which resembled some huge cauldron, for the liquid mass was boiling and bubbling as though a gigantic fire burned beneath it. This, then, was the cause of the heat that had overpowered him while floating upon it.

He puts forward the theory that the Malström empties its cooling waters into this basin in the earth's centre, the heat of which is thus to some extent regulated. This water, he maintains, is gradually converted into a vapour by the intense heat, and escapes through different channels to the earth's surface, the main channel of which enters beneath the water of the Gulf of Florida. This, therefore, upsets his former calculations, and confirms a suggestion that I laughingly made before he started upon his voyage.

Lying around the boat in various positions were myriads of loathsome forms—half man, half reptile—wallowing in the swampy ground, and sucking in, with seeming enjoyment, the poisonous, stifling air. The lower half of these forms resembled an alligator, while the upper part was distinctly human. From the face, which I have already described, a pair of sloping shoulders ended in long, thin, sinewy arms, which were altogether out of proportion to the rest of the body. It was upon these that the monster, with his hands dug claw-like into the oozy ground, raised himself into a semi-erect position.

As the atmosphere grew heavier, these noisome brutes raised themselves upon their muscular arms, and, lifting their heads well up into the air, gave forth bellow after bellow, that reverberated throughout the whole length of the boat.

Then it appears they commenced to gambol, not as ordinary animals, gently and playfully, but as fierce fiends whose one delight it was to kill their fellows, and that with as much cruelty and torture as possible. Two or three of them would set upon one and rend him piece by piece—tearing at his throat or gouging his eyes out. With their massive claws they would take a keen delight in lacerating the flesh of the weaker kind, exposing with fiendish glee the poor brute's corded muscles.

This went on for some hours. It seemed, in fact, as though this brutality were but a preconcerted farce, and that they were waiting for further events to unfold themselves. In this surmise he was correct. As the air outside assumed a singularly transparent grey—the steaming atmosphere kept whirling upwards, leaving for a moment a gap about a foot wide above the soil, soon to be refilled by more mist—a low chant broke upon his ears. Out from the mist loomed thousands upon thousands of figures, magnified by the hazy atmosphere till their forms resembled the ghosts of pre-historic monsters. On, on they came, and at their advent, the detachment round the boat fell upon their faces in solemn reverence.

In a vast semi-circle the motley crowd gathered around, leaving in their midst a broad pathway.

At this point my friend becomes for a short time coherent and in his own words:

"Down the pathway, waddling erect upon their hind feet, came two gigantic specimens of this mysterious tribe, bearing upon their shoulders the most beautiful type of womanhood that ever breathed. Clothed in a shimmering drapery, their chieftainess—my queen—slowly descended from her insecure perch and stood radiantly fair before her bowing people.

"Struck with wonder that so divine a form could have strayed into so loathsome a land, I watched, Jack, and as I watched, my very soul yearned for one look of love from those eyes, which, though I could not see, I felt must be sublime as her body was beautiful. Once more her bearers picked her up, and, lifting her upon their shoulders, they raised her to the top of the boat, where she stood erect and queenly within a few yards of my window. From the time of her arrival until the moment when she so nearly approached me, the quaint chant had continued, but now as she held up her dainty hand, the voices ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and I heard her address the masses in a peculiarly sweet-toned voice; and as she swayed her lissom body from side to side, a smile of ineffable sadness flitted across her features, while the concluding words of her strange speech were drowned in the vast roar of thousands of delighted throats.

"Suddenly her gaze lit upon my face peering through the window, and she started back with a little cry of surprise. Recovering herself, however, she stepped towards me—her eyes betokening a sweet welcome—with a question in her own strange tongue upon her lips. And then, Jack, I did the most foolish thing that could possibly be done.

"As her soft grey eyes sought mine, my prudence forsook me, and, overcome by the mute appeal to trust that shone in their very depths, I cast loose the bolts and stepped forth from my stronghold to her side. The ferocity of her people held no terrors for me—my very nerves, my heart, my soul, were *hers*.

"Full of hope, I strode towards her—Innani, the brutes called her—holding out my arms to clasp her to me, and as I strode, she was transformed, disfigured, a fiend incarnate. From her eyes the soft glow had fled, and in its stead there blazed a light so baleful, so malign, that I sank down upon my knees, abashed.

"Fiendish contortions twisted and wracked the face that but a few minutes before had seemed so fair and smiling.

"Her very body shook with that suppressed rage and malice which blazed upon me the moment after.

"At a word from their queen, her hideous guards seized me from behind. So strong was their grasp, that, struggle as I might, the grip of their scaly hands was not diminished in the slightest. The more I struggled the more Innani's now cruel eyes sparkled with glee, and so I gave it up and let them do with me as they willed."

Here again the statements begin to ramble, and the course of after events is difficult to follow. It would seem, however, that he was carried beside the queen, Innani, held on either side by the grim followers of her train.

Thus was he led on and on through the mist up a steep incline till a vast city loomed threateningly before them. As they drew nearer, the walls and roofs became more distinct, and he was able to distinguish the manner and material with which they were built.

The houses appeared to rise sheer out of the omnipresent slush, with their scaly walls of pumice stone made green by constant damp. The streets were narrow and filthy in the extreme, while the paneless windows were overcrowded with those awful people, whose eyes were fixed upon him with vindictive glee.

Amid the hoarse roar of this vast concourse, he was carried through avenue after avenue, until at last a gigantic square, surrounded on all sides by terraced palaces, more vast and inconceivable than any he had hitherto seen, burst upon his view.

Then amid a breathless silence Innani entered the central palace, and reappeared a few moments later to address her subjects from an upper window. Again she looked divinely fair, and again my friend lost all control over himself, and yearned for one transient look of love, for which he would willingly have resigned himself to death.

Minute after minute dragged by as Innani harangued her people, and although he knew not the language in which she spoke, her very actions, coupled with the ominous glances cast upon him, bespoke the doom he felt must be near at hand. Soon, too soon, *he* thought, was he borne out of the sight of her who had cast upon him that spell of foolish infatuation.

They led him back to his ship, and, placing him in his study, guarded the door that he might not escape. Here it was that he wrote me his history amidst the incessant din of destruction wrought by these noisome folk. With the conviction that his doom was approaching, he wrote without ceasing, until his tired mind, unstrung with days of terror, at last refused its office, thus causing the end of his story to take the form of a madman's ravings.

What his ultimate fate was and how he dispatched his letter to me can only remain a matter of conjecture.

The probability is, however, that, finding a bladder, he placed his missive within and cast it loose upon the lake, from whence it floated to the earth's surface, propelled by the stream.

As to whether he met his death at the hands of the vampire queen, or whether her cruel spirit was softened by the great love he bore her, will, perhaps, never be known. Personally, I cannot believe that one so beautiful as she apparently was could perform an act so brutal as cold-blooded murder, and so I live on in the hopes that at some future time I may again hear from a friend who thus sacrificed himself in the pursuits of science and for the good of humanity.

A Speaking Likeness.

By Lionel Hart.

"Sirrah, thou art quite right," said the picture.

Having hitherto lived under the impression that oil-paintings, like good little boys, were things to be seen and not heard, I started up somewhat surprised at this unexpected and somewhat peremptory confirmation of a thought that had risen unbidden to my lips. I sat bolt upright in bed, my heart thumping wildly against my ribs, with quick-coming breath and hurrying pulse, and found myself staring with mingled awe and wonder at a curious old canvas facing me from which the words that had so startled me had undoubtedly come.

My bedroom was a snug, old-fashioned chamber in an old-fashioned inn not a hundred miles from London; one of those pleasant places of the past, nearly all of which our modern improvements and fashions have swept away. On the wall of my apartment hung a dusty portrait in a carved oak frame, which I had been intently watching by the fitful, flickering firelight for some time, waiting for that "sweet oblivion" that is the due of each and all of us who have passed a long day in healthy exercise in the open air.

It was the likeness of an elderly gentleman, apparently in the costume of James the First's reign; so clouded and bedimmed, however, was the canvas with age, and so faded the colours, that beyond faintly discerning that he was dressed in a long-waisted doublet, square collar, and conical-shaped hat, it was impossible to tell what his costume in detail was like. The face, however, stood out powerfully from its heavy background, and with its pale, hueless flesh, deep-sunken eyes, white, downy beard, and cold, stern glance, looked grim and spectral enough in all conscience as the flames jumped and quivered in the deep tiled fireplace.

I had been sleepily musing for some time on that stern visage, and had been noting the various expressions that seemed to flit across it as the fire now rose and now sank before finally expiring, and had just muttered: "What strange tales that old chap could tell! What scenes, what men and women might he bring back!" when I was thunderstruck by receiving a reply to my thoughts in the words already given: "Sirrah, thou art quite right."

The voice from the picture was human and strong, although, perhaps, it sounded as coming from afar off; the mouth twitched, the eyes gleamed, and I stared and stared, fearful yet wishful to hear more. My fright was somewhat allayed by the next remark of my strange companion: "S'death! why gapes the man so? Ho! sir owl, take heed of your eyeballs; I would not that they should fall out for me."

"Well, the truth is," I gasped, "I have never before had the honour of being addressed by a—a——"

"A picture," rather rudely interrupted my companion. "Still, a picture that has hung on the walls for nearly three hundred years has—as thou wert thinking, almost saying—seen many persons, witnessed many scenes, haply played a part of its own in the comedies and tragedies of those centuries. Come, my eyes are dull with long watching, my ears strained with long listening, my voice hard and harsh with long silence. I'faith, I shall be pleased with a holiday after so protracted a quiescence. Methinks thou art wide awake for the moment. Lie back, bridle thy tongue, and open thine ears, and I will give such matter for thy miserable quill-driving as will make some pestilent editor or the other pleased enow to see thee when thou goest to him with the notes (or, as King Jamie would have termed them, the *memorabilia*) of my adventures in thy hands."

To tell the truth, having by this time recovered my courage, I rather resented this off-hand and somewhat contemptuous reference to my literary occupations, and felt really hurt that he should allude to those great gentlemen who watch over the destinies of our journals and magazines as "pestilent." Still, something new, or something so old as to appear to be new, is, after all, what most of us are in search of in the present day, so, slipping quietly down in bed again, I lay with my hands clasped behind my head and my eyes fixed on the now animated features of the portrait, which, with a preliminary "Ahem!" to clear a throat through which no sound had passed for centuries, spoke as follows:

"It was not always my fortune to hang on the walls of a dingy bedroom in a miserable wayside pothouse. No! I have adorned many a noble gallery and hall. I have dwelt in lordly mansions, looking down for years on wealth, rank, beauty, and fashion. All that is over now, and here I suppose I shall end my days in obscurity and oblivion. Yet was my beginning in worse surroundings than my ending is likely to be. The first objects that met my eyes on coming into existence were two men—the elder handsome of feature and beautifully clad in black velvet, with large felt hat, silk stockings, and shoes to match; the other attired in a sky-blue doublet of silk, very greasy, and covered with great stains as of liquor, a ragged lace fall, and short cloak in like condition—i'faith, a poverty-stricken rake and a scapegrace.

"The chamber in which I found myself was a miserable garret, with bare white walls, and a boarded floor broken in many places. The windows were dim and dusty, the cold air whistling in through many a shattered pane. The apartment was strewn about with a few pieces of tawdry finery, a helmet and rapier, paint brushes, gallipots, and broken flasks. Such was the place in which I first saw the light.

"As I opened my eyes I perceived the elder man standing close in front of me with a paint brush near my visage, and then it was that I apprehended that it was through a touch of his pencil of camel's hair that I had been endowed with vision, and so had entered on this weary world. At that moment a flood of feeling thrilled through every thread of my canvas; I saw, I heard, I understood. 'There,' said the elder man, laying aside his brush and speaking in a beautifully soft voice, but with a strong foreign accent, 'now your picture lives. Ah! how is it that I fail to teach so many of my pupils that "dot on the eye" that gives life to a portrait?'

"'Because not even Sir Anthony Vandyck can convey what he never learnt, and what the King says he received direct from Heaven—talent and genius,' replied the other. 'At best I shall be but a poor imitator and copyist of thy great methods, never a creator of any of my own.'

"'Tut! Tut! thou hast talent enough if thou didst not drown it in sack and claret wine, and eke skill, if thou didst but labour to perfect it instead of passing thy afternoons at the playhouses and thy nights dicing and brawling in the taverns across the river. Come, come, let us examine thy portrait; time presses, and I needs must be at Whitehall by eleven. Good! very good! a great improvement, and an excellent likeness. What says Sir Fairfax of his image?'

"'S'life, Sir Antonio, the growling old wolf vows 'tis too old for him. I have pocketed and spent nearly all the money in advance, or i'faith I believe he'd refuse to take the picture; he comes here this morning to see it finished. Hark! hither mounts old Firebrand up the stairs even now.'

"And verily a loud stamping noise, mingled with volleys of fierce-grunted oaths, is heard approaching the apartment, and a moment after the rickety door is kicked open, and there enters Sir Fairfax Carruthers, my great original. 'Curse the stairs,' he growled on entering, 'why dost thou not live a'top of Paul's Church instead of in Southwark, if thou so lovest the clouds?' 'Ah! Sir Anthony, my service, and good-morrow to you.' 'Well, Master Worthless, what have thy pig's bristles made

"There enters Sir Fairfax Carruthers, my great original."

of my visage since last I saw thy limning?' Then, staring at the portrait: 'Nay, nay, 'tis too old even yet—my mirror teaches me my face better than that, and may I be quartered if I have canals like those at the corners of my eyes and alongside my nose.'

"'Verily thou art wrong, Sir Fairfax,' said the painter, 'the portrait is like thee and not a single hour too old. Ask my great master, Sir Anthony.'

"'Don Antonio will never say that my beard is such a doormat, or that my forehead is rutted like a field in furrow.'

"'Truly, sir,' said Vandyck, sweeping him a bow with his broad-brimmed hat, 'Time makes a highway of all our brows, and there are none so hard as not to show some track of his chariot-wheels; as for the picture, if it fail to do complete justice to Sir Fairfax Carruthers, yet I hold it a right well finished piece and a speaking likeness. What would a gentleman more?'

"'Well! well!' replied the baronet, evidently somewhat mollified by the great artist's opinion, 'I dare swear you are right; see here, the picture is a present for my young wife, and when it is women we have to please, why then we are as chary of our looks and years as any blushing maid of sixteen. Send the picture home to-night, Sir Dauber; to-morrow it shall to my lady at Weston Abbey.' And linking his arm in that of Vandyck, with a nodded farewell to the artist, to which Sir Anthony added a kindly shake of his forefinger, as if to remind him of their earlier conversation, the two gentlemen left the attic.

"The next day I started on my journey to my owner's house in Oxfordshire. It was a large rambling mansion that had formerly been a monastic establishment, and which Bluff King Hal had presented to Sir Fairfax's grandfather when he dispersed the monks and closed the religious houses. It was full of long passages, dark stairs, and gloomy recesses, wherein a man might as easily lose himself as in the labyrinths at Hampton Court, Greenwich Hill, and Southwark.

"My Lady Carruthers was fair and young, and by forty years junior to her lord. He consequently was desperately jealous, and would never allow her to go to London, where she might be exposed to the gallantries of the Court beaux, but kept her mewed up in this mouldy old mansion, while he went to the metropolis to attend to his parliamentary duties.

"Once in town the worthy old baronet fuddled himself with ale and Xeres wine, smoked himself stupid on the stage at the playhouse, and passed his nights at the tavern losing high sums at 'Ruff,' 'Post and Pair,' and 'All Fours.' Lady Carruthers saw but few visitors, and a desolate, dreary life she had of it.

"'Quick, hide, hide, or are we both dead.'"

"I was received by her with great delight, welcomed as a friend and companion, and hung up in her own private closet, where she would sit for hours looking at me, musing till the tears rolled down her cheeks and her pretty eyes were dimmed and reddened with much weeping. As for Master Arthur, the son and heir of about eight years of age, he only deigned to notice me once, when he shook his little fist passionately in my face with anything but filial respect.

"Some months passed in this monotonous way, when I fancied that my mistress' manner was changed somewhat; she no longer gazed at me wistfully as had been her wont; indeed, she seldom glanced in my direction, and when she did 'twas with a mixed look of fear and aversion that rather avoided my eye than sought it. The cause of this I was soon to learn. The apartment in which I was hung was a kind of tiring-closet, and was between my mistress' bed-chamber and a room looking out upon the courtyard. One night, when the rest of the house was sunk in sleep, the door of communication between the rooms being ajar, I saw my lady standing at an open window, through which had evidently come the gallant who was kneeling at her feet.

"Lady Carruthers seemed angry and distressed, and dismissed her companion with scant ceremony; but alas! a few nights later he came again, when he was not so sternly rebuked; and yet a third time, when he was admitted to the chamber in which I was. Once inside, he began making violent love to her, kissing her hands, and imploring her to fly with him.

"While she for a while seemed balanced between virtue and dishonour, there suddenly arose a great clamour of horses and men, and a great clanging of bells and falling of knockers, as if the King himself had come to demand admittance. Her ladyship rushed to the window, only to stagger back in dismay, for in one brief glance she had recognised her husband in the courtyard, and even now could hear his heavy footstep mounting the stair.

"'By the Lord, 'tis Sir Fairfax,' says my lady in a tremulous whisper, 'and in a moment he will be at the door. Quick, hide, hide, or are we both dead,' and, pulling aside a heavy curtain, she disclosed a small shallow cupboard in the woodwork, used to keep garments and mantles, and which was just high enough to permit a man to stand upright within it. Hardly had the gallant concealed himself when Sir Fairfax crossed the ante-room and stood within the tiring-closet.

"He was just the same as when I first saw him, and when we stood gazing at each other as in a mirror. A little greyer, haply, about the head and beard, and a vein or two of deeper crimson on the nose and cheek, but booted, clad, and hatted as of yore, with the addition of a pair of horse-pistols in his belt, which he had evidently just withdrawn from the holsters of his saddle. He greeted my lady kindly enough, in his rude, boisterous fashion, said he knew he was none the less welcome for being unexpected, and swore he would have his supper brought to him there. 'Here burns a goodly fire upon the hearth,' said he, 'and it was cold riding those last eight miles from Oxford. By the time these varlets kindle in the hall I shall die of hunger and cold.'

"My lady turned pale at these words, and tried to persuade him to take his meal below; but nothing would please him but that she must go and give orders for meat and drink to be served to him where he was. 'Why, what the fiend ails thee, Lucy? Thou'rt white as a ghost. Is it from pain or pleasure at seeing thy husband return? Come, bustle, bustle!' 'I am not well to-night,' she said, with a poor attempt at a smile, and left the apartment to see about Sir Fairfax's supper.

"When she was gone, he fell to pulling off his boots and chafing his hands and to walking up and down, humming some lewd song of the town the while. Suddenly he commenced to shiver, and finding to his evident surprise that the window in the next room was open, he went in and closed it, muttering many a curse upon the oaf who had left it unbolted. Returning to the closet, he caught sight of something that for a moment put a stop to his walking, his cursing, and his singing.

"I followed his eye, and saw that a hand's breadth of the silk that sometimes bordered the short cloak of the cavaliers of that day was protruding from the crack of the cupboard where the gallant was hidden, and which had got shut in in the hurry of concealment. Sir Fairfax, after a moment's pause, resumed his singing, and, drawing a poignard from his girdle and walking quite quietly and naturally to the wainscot, deftly cut off the damning fragment of finery and stuffed it in his breeches' pocket.

"When the supper arrived and my lady returned, he set to teasing her about the window, wondering whether it was for star-gazing or her health's good that she had left it open, and declaring that her negligence had caused him to take cold, and that before he supped he must change the cloak he then wore for a heavier one lined with sables which he had purchased of the great Muscovy Company at their warehouse in Seeding Lane. 'I am sure,' said he, 'I left it hanging in yonder cupboard when last I was here; go, my girl, open it and see if thou canst find it for me.' My poor lady turned first red and then white, stammered, faltered, and at length declared that the cloak was not there, as only the day before she had searched the cupboard, since when she had mislaid the key.

"Sir Fairfax seemed satisfied with this explanation, and sat down to his supper, eating and drinking with great appetite. All the while he talked and joked consumedly, told her how the King had suddenly dissolved parliament, which was the cause of his return, detailed the latest scandals of the court, the gossip of the playhouses, and the news from the taverns. What his lady suffered all this time thou canst better imagine than I describe.

"At length, having drained a bumper of burgundy for the fifth time, he said, after a short pause in his chattering: 'See here, birdie, I must tell thee of a famous wager I have on with my Lord of Buckingham. He has bet me a hundred pounds that I cannot put three bullets running into a man's heart at seven paces. We're having a dummy made, with a heart stitched on it, and on my return to town the trial is to come off. Why, see here—the thing is as easy for an old shot like me as hitting a haystack. Suppose this to be a man's heart,' drawing the piece of silk from his pocket, 'and this, pointing to his own chest, to be its height from the ground,' and he stuck his dagger through the rag into the cupboard. 'Now, my lady, thou shalt be umpire, I take aim, and——'

"Here Sir Fairfax raised his pistol and took aim at the crumpled snippet nailed to the wainscot. My lady rushed forward with a scream, and for a moment stayed his hand. But her husband pushed her rudely off, and, hoarsely shouting: 'Why Lucy, make such a fuss for a possible hole in a taffety cape,' fired. A dull smothered groan from behind the wall, and my lady sank fainting to the ground.

"At the report, five or six frightened varlets rushed into the room, and peering through the smoke that hung heavily in the hot and viand-laden air, and seeing their mistress at full length upon the floor, at first thought that she had been slain. But Sir Fairfax, with all his long restrained choler breaking from its control, yelled out: 'Burst the door, burst that door, ye paper-faced, white-livered, gaping baboons, shiver the cursed lock, for as I live a man's there.'

"But even then they did not move, and so Sir Fairfax himself smashed the lock with the butt of the discharged and smoking pistol, which he still held in his hand. When the panel was slid back, down fell the dead body of the cavalier face forwards, the blood gushing from the head and meandering over the floor.

"'Not a bad strike for a hooded hawk,' sneered Sir Fairfax. 'Let's see his pretty face,' and, turning over the body with his foot and gazing on the blood-covered visage: 'Ho, ho, Master Charles Ormsby! must needs come poaching in thy neighbour's preserves? now hast thou something in thy head to balance thy feathery brains. Here, carry him off, some of you knaves.'

"But at that moment, seeing his wife recovering from her swoon, he continued: 'But no, 'twere pity to baulk her ladyship of her amusement; as she minded to pass the evening with her paramour, so let it be, and may their conversation be agreeable.' And, seizing the heavy candelabrum, he made for the door, followed by the servants.

"When my lady saw that she was to be left alone with the corpse she clung to Sir Fairfax and implored him to hear her and to have mercy, swearing she would rather he killed her outright than that she should be left in such gruesome company. But he threw her from him with much force, bruising her beautiful arm against the corner of the table, and went out, locking the door behind him.

"As the footsteps died away my lady's shrieks increased, until, worn out with screaming and terror, she sank down by the door, with her face in her hands to shut out the horrid thing on the floor, moaning grievously from time to time. By now there was no light except what the fire gave, and terrible it was to see that mysterious form lying so still and dark, except where now and then the flickering flame lit up some ornament of gold or steel. Suddenly I fancied I saw it move, and, though being a picture, and so scarce blessed with nerves, I must confess I was just a bit alarmed when I did see it sit up and gaze about.

"Never have these eyes looked upon a more terrible sight than upon that distorted face all bemasked with blood—red and horrible in the lurid light of the blazing embers. My lady, hearing a movement, and seeing as she thought the dead moving, began to scream louder than ever.

"'Hist,' said the cavalier, 'for God's good sake make no noise; I'm not yet food for worms. When I understood the old scoundrel's play acting I ducked as deep as I could, and the bullet but grazed my cheek and took off a bit of my ear. While he was breaking open the door I smeared my face with blood, so that when I tumbled out he should take me for dead. Otherwise he and his bullies would have dispatched me where I lay. Now my turn has come, and in the space of four-and-twenty hours I will rid him both of life and lady. Come, love, let us fly.'

"Then, seeing that her ladyship responded not to his advances, nor showed great pleasure at his escape, he sidled up to her, and, attempting to take her hand, said: 'Sweetheart! let us rejoice rather at this occurrence.'

"My lady sprang from him as from the approach of some noxious thing.

"'Rejoice, rejoice,' she cried, 'no! Better, perhaps, if he had pierced thy black, foul heart, and stayed thee in thy sins. For one moment I was mad and listened to thee; now am I again sane, and can measure the worth of villains like thee, who would make husbands wifeless, and sires and brothers dishonoured to please a passing passion. Go, sir, while thou mayst; if thou lingerest but the space of five minutes I will find some means to give the alarm and call my husband back.'

"'I will go, madam,' he replied; 'but thy devoted husband will hear from me in the morning, and before this time to-morrow I hope to have the honour of making thee a widow.'

"During the conversation he had been carefully removing the traces of blood from his face with the help of an ewer of water and a napkin that he found on the supper table. Having finished his ablutions, he flicked the dust from his clothes, arranged

himself leisurely before the mirror, and, with a sweeping bow to my lady, disappeared through the window of the antechamber as he had come.

"I pass over Sir Fairfax's rage and mortification when he discovered that his fancied prey had escaped him, and the bitter railings that followed between him and his wife. They were cut short by the arrival of a *cartel* from Ormsby. That night another figure lay quiet and still in the old paneled chamber; but this time it was a real corpse—an elder with iron-grey hair and snow-white beard, and a little crimson gash on the left breast, and a beauteous lady hung weeping the livelong night over that awful form, well weening all the time that no tears might wash away the memory of her fault, or heal that gaping wound, or bring the dead Sir Fairfax to life again.

"After Sir Fairfax's death, Newton Abbey was utterly desolate for many years. The Civil War had broken out, and Lady Carruthers went I know not whither. Some said she took the child with her abroad and devoted herself to his bringing up, dying in a convent in Flanders about ten years later. Anyhow, I never saw her again.

"For years no one approached me but the old housekeeper, and occasionally a visitor who came to see the house and gape at the pictures. Once I received a call from some highwaymen, who broke into the place and took away whatever they might lay their wicked hands on. They brought up a cask of wine from the cellar and made merry in the chamber where I was.

"There was no one to hinder them doing as they pleased except the old housekeeper before mentioned and her husband, and they fared terribly at the hands of the ruffians because they would not disclose where the plate was hid. The detestable villains hung the man to the top of the bedpost, and as touching the woman, when they had drunk as much liquor as they wanted, they spilled the remainder on the floor, and, forcing the poor creature into the empty barrel and nailing down the head fast, left her.

"For three days no one came near the place, and I was left alone with a hideous corpse and a shrieking maniac. On the third day the groans and shrieks ceased. By a horrible fatality the first person to make discovery of the double murder was the son of the old couple. He was a scholar of Oxford, and had ridden over to see his parents. Torch in hand, he went from room to room searching for sire and mother, and finding them at length in the sad plight I have just set forth. Such a meeting may I never see again.

"After this the place became more lonely and avoided than ever No one now came to brush the dust from my face or clothes, and all the lesser animals seemed to regard me as their legitimate prey. Spiders spun webs across my eyes and nose, which annoyed me terribly; rats would rush wildly behind me in the wainscot, so that I nearly jumped in fright to the floor; worms got into my frame; in fact, I was threatened with complete dissolution, while the house itself was gradually falling into decay.

"One day I was overjoyed to hear voices and horses' hoofs in the courtyard, and presently four or five men in steel corselets and buff coats entered the chamber. They searched carefully the whole place, beating the walls with the hilts of their heavy swords, and digging up and peering under the rotten boards of the floor. They even tore me down from the wall from which I had so long depended, hacking at my stout, thick frame with their knives and daggers. Seemingly they were disappointed in their quest, for one hulking brute called me an 'old man of Belial,' and spat in my face, while another drove his heavy jack-boot through my doublet, ruining it for ever. And thus injured and insulted the knaves left me.

"'Not a bad strike for a hooded hawk,' sneered Sir Fairfax."

"Another long period I was left alone, and then one day a change came indeed. Carpenters, masons, and upholsterers filled the house, and nothing was heard but the noise of saws and hammers, and the quips and jests of those who wielded them. Everything was fresh gilded and decorated; the hole in my doublet was mended by a cunning artificer, my frame restored, and I was moved from that dismal tiring-closet to take my place among other family portraits in the great hall.

"And then commenced the most brilliant part of my career—an era of magnificence on which I look back with longing and love. All the letters I possess, all the elegance and information I ever acquired, all that could gladden, cultivate, or refine a picture of my temperament, I found in that meteoric period of my being when Charles II. was king and my new owner (the little Arthur of early days, now raised from a baronetcy to a peerage by reason of his devotion during the royal troubles) came to reside at Newton Abbey.

"Now could I catalogue glorious *fêtes*, balls, masques, and banquets, at which the rank, beauty, and fashion of England feasted and danced in those bright and gilded saloons. Verily, sometimes I was shocked at some unworthy display of profligacy and villainy; as when the Earl of Rochester, Lord Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley, and other roystering blades, danced a saraband in the hall, dressed as we are told were the Satyrs of old—that is to say, as animals up to their middle *et præterea nihil*, and some lady, scandalised even in those loose times at such behaviour, poured boiling water down upon them from the gallery above, till the blistered libertines were forced to beat a retreat Or when my own master mixed some eastern drug with the wine at supper, by which all the women became seized with a kind of drunken madness. Saints and martyrs! What a scene was that! Can I ever forget the flashing eyes and streaming hair and wild pranks of those beautiful Bacchantes?

"But it likes me not to linger over such scenes as these; rather let me hurry to describe the event that ultimately and indirectly led to my exile from that house of which I had so long been a denizen. My lord was a fearful gamester. I have often known him sit up with three or four other choice spirits for three days and three nights at the cards without stopping, except to snatch a mouthful to eat or to drain a flask of wine.

"One night very late there were four of them in the hall as usual—my lord, Lord Putney, Colonel Firebrace, and the Marquis di Divici, an Italian. My lord lost heavily, and at last rose, saying he could play no more, as he had no stiver left.

"'Oh! that matters not,' said the Colonel, 'we can wager other things than money—lands, houses, horses, pictures, jewels, what you will.'

"Said my lord: 'As for my lands and houses they have long been mortgaged, as well you wot, to pay my gaming losses to you gentlemen. The horses are but hired, and as touching my jewels, why our lady friends rifled my pockets the other night while I was drunk and took away the key of the strong-room, and i' faith before I was sober in the morning had divided its contents among them. The portraits of my ancestors I will never hazard on the turn of a die, but here is something that will serve.' And, putting his hand into his bosom, he drew thence a medallion heavily framed in diamonds, and evidently of great value. The game proceeded, and after a little my lord was declared a loser as usual, when he produced a knife and proceeded to cut out the miniature preparatory to handing over the setting.

"'What do you, my lord?' said Firebrace, leaning over the table.

"'I am taking out the portrait,' was the answer, 'that was not included in the venture.'

"'I protest against this,' said the Colonel. 'And I,' echoed Lord Putney and the Italian. 'The picture is a fine work of art, and is worth the stones themselves,' continued the Colonel, 'and we are all three of a mind to have it.'

"'Hark ye, gentlemen,' cried my lord, rising with a bright spot in either cheek, 'this is the likeness of an angel, once on earth, now in heaven. She gave it me, and, by the living God! I'll keep it while I can draw breath and a sword. Why, it is too good for me to possess, much more for you. Yes,' continued my lord, with sparkling eyes and face aflame, 'if I would not risk my ancestors for fear of their falling into the hands of swindlers, do you think I would *her—her?* Whoever takes that picture must take my life first. There it lies' (putting it on the table and drawing his sword) 'come on. I will take you one by one, and the man who kills me can take the medal. I shall have no further need for it then. Have I said enough?'

"'Too much to pass unpunished,' replied Lord Putney. 'You have applied a term to us that only your blood can wash out. By rank and age I claim the right to first engage you.'

"To it they went, the other two looking on. I had no fear for my lord, for I knew him to be an expert swordsman, and after a brief bout down went my Lord Putney on the oaken floor, curling his limbs up with a moan of agony, stabbed through the heart.

"'Safe so far,' said my lord grimly, and, taking a deep breath, 'whose is the honour?'

"The Colonel stepped heavily forward with a wild glare in his eyes, evidently dismayed at the quick punishment his companion had received. Like so many military men of the time, he was but a poor master of fence, and his cut-and-thrust style of an earlier generation was no match for the more elegant and deadly method of my master, picked up during his sojourn in foreign parts. The Colonel fought doggedly, but with no spring or attack, like a man who feels he will be beaten in the end, and who only seeks to keep off that end as long as possible.

"After a few minutes' play he received a deep wound in the chest, and, staggering to a low wooden settle placed at right angles to the fireplace, fell his length along it as if dead. Then came the turn of the Italian, and this was the man I feared. I knew him to be unscrupulous, for, from high above him on the wall, I had often seen him cheat at cards, and once I had detected him pocketing a rouleau of moidores that had, unnoticed, slipped from under my master's elbow to the floor. He came forward with a courteous bow, and begged my lord to take a few moments' repose after his late exertions. My lord poured out a cup of wine, and his adversary did the same; they solemnly pledged each other, and then fell to.

"The Italian, like most from his country, was a splendid swordsman, yet were the two fairly enough matched. But my lord was getting faint with so much fighting and emotion, and his enemy pressed him hard, and I thought his time had come. When his defence was growing weaker and weaker his foe's foot slipped in a pool of blood or wine upon the floor and he literally fell upon my master's sword-point. Then, marvellous to tell, instead of being pierced by the weapon on which he had tumbled with all his weight, it broke off short with a loud 'ping' in my lord's hand.

"'Ah! double dyed traitor,' cried the latter, 'a shirt of mail,' and seizing him by the throat with his left hand, with his right he battered at his face with the hilt of his broken sword.

"But the wily foreign villain closed with him, and, shortening his rapier, stabbed my lord first through the left arm, so that he released his hold somewhat, and then in the side. A gasp—a groan—a clutch at the empty air—and he lay a corpse at the feet of his treacherous guest. All this time no one had come in to interrupt this dreadful tragedy. The servants were all sleeping on the other side of the house; had they even been near and awake they would hardly have interfered; verily they were too accustomed in that house to revelry and riot to disturb themselves for the clash of rapiers or the sound of a pistol shot.

"I looked anxiously to see what the survivor would now do. He crept softly to the door and peered out, and, having satisfied himself that none were moving, he returned and gathered together all the money that was on the table, not forgetting the medallion that had been the unhappy cause of all this bloodshed. He then visited the bodies of his three whilom companions, emptying their pockets, and taking from them whatever of value they had about them. As he was drawing a ring off Colonel Firebrace's finger the wounded man opened his eyes and muttered something. With a ghastly grin the villain pinned him with his sword to the settle across which, as I told thee before, he had fallen, hissing: 'Better so. As these English dogs say: "Dead men tell no tales."'

"Then, seizing a cloak that was lying on a stool, he put all his booty therein, and, tying the corners together with the cords so as to make a kind of bag, he slung the whole around his neck, and, putting a chair upon the table, mounted into one of the deep recessed windows. Opening the casement with great difficulty he crept through with his precious burden, and, shutting the window as he thought, stood safely on the leads.

"But once outside some noise disturbed him, and, fearing to be seen, he stepped

back into the shadow of the building, and in so doing leant against the window which he in his haste had insecurely fastened. It yielded under his weight and that of the plunder he bore, and back he dropped through lead and wood and crashing glass, and, striking his head against the corner of the table by which he had mounted, fell with a smashed skull and broken neck dead upon the floor. No one ever knew all that I knew, and when the four bodies were found lying scattered about the hall, the Italian all laden with gold, without anything to explain the mystery, wonder and fear were on all, and none could guess the secret that was clear to me.

"With my lord's death ended the most brilliant part of my career; since then my life has been one long succession of ups and downs, and for the most part spent in lowly circles. Newton Abbey and all its contents were sold, for my master died dreadfully in debt, and for a few paltry crowns I became the property of an old Israelitish broker who had travelled all the way on foot from his shop in the London Jewry to see what bargains he could pick up. With him I remained many years.

"Every day I was cruelly exposed outside his filthy den in company with broken furniture, old garments, cracked crockery, and the like, until both my spirits and colours began to fade, and I felt that life was slowly ebbing from me.

"From this position of indignity I was one day rescued by the grandson of my late master's steward. He recognised me, bought me for a few shillings, took me to his lodgings in Drury Lane, and, having washed my face and generally revived me, hung me in his parlour to remind him of the old house in the country that he had left for ever. Here again I rested a long space.

"My owner married a sweet little woman, who was wardrobe keeper at the theatre hard by, and never has it been my lot to witness a happier household than theirs. Their eldest son became an actor, and played many parts with the great Mr. Garrick, and when on his father's death he removed me to his dressing-room behind the scenes, I there saw many a costume and heard rehearsed many a sentence and phrase that called up from the past the men and times that I knew when I first came into the world.

"But my new owner was a rake and a scapegrace, and one day pawned me, in company with a silver-hilted sword and a pair of paste buckles, to purchase a ticket for a masquerade. I was never redeemed, and again after years of waiting I emerged from my oblivion in the society of several other portraits of gentlemen in armour and slashed doublets, and ladies in coifs, high ruffs, and deep farthingales, to deck the walls of a rich, city merchant, anxious to impose upon his friends that we represented his dead-and-gone ancestors.

"I was taken to his new mansion in the pleasant suburb of Chelsea, and was disgusted with the newness and vulgarity and quantity of gilding and fresh painting that I there found. The purse-proud merchant used to take his visitors through his gallery and point out each portrait as of some distinguished forbear of his, telling a long string of lies of the deeds, doings, and character of everyone.

"Faugh! how I have laughed at his ignorance and mendacity and want of memory Why at one time I was Cornelius de Tompkyns, a distinguished poet of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; at another I was General Tompkyns, second in command of Charles I.'s forces when he was at Oxford. Then I have heard myself described as Baron Tompkyns, created a peer for my adherence to the Royalist cause; and the next day as Admiral Tompkyns, who sailed six times round the world, discovered Florida, and smoked tobacco with Sir Walter Raleigh. I could see the idiot's friends laughing behind his back, and felt ashamed that I should thus be held up to ridicule by being pointed out as an ancestor of a Tompkyns.

"However, a picture dealer this time rescued me from my false position. After having examined me for some time with much attention, he offered such a sum for

"With his right he battered at his face with the hilt of his broken sword."

me that my owner, who with all his riches really loved a good deal, closed at once

"I was taken to London by my new possessor, and soon found myself in a dark back room, where I was handed over to the tender mercies of three men. I was taken out of my frame, laid flat on the table, then, with soap, flannel, and various strange and foul-smelling compounds, they did so rub and scrub and intreat me that very soon I thought my beard and hair would have come away altogether.

"But this was not to be, for they touched up the spots whence the colour had departed, and one man then very carefully wrote in the corner, 'Antonio Vandyck, eques pit.' After that I was baked in an oven until I had recovered a certain depth of my old tone, when I was re-strained, varnished, and framed. I was then sold to a young man who had just come into a large fortune, and who was anxious to possess some goodly specimens of the old masters. In his possession I remained for nearly forty years, and was looked up to with such respect during most of that

"He recognised me, bought me for a few shillings."

time as the work of the great Sir Anthony that I almost began to believe the pleasant fiction myself.

"But with advancing years and judgment my master commenced to have his doubts of my genuineness; and when one night a fire took place at his house, and in the confusion while intending to save a precious Raphael from the flames he found he had preserved me instead and left the Italian to perish, his language on that occasion was so foul that I was left in no doubt as to the opinion he entertained of my origin. While other things were being looked after I was left where my master in his rage and disappointment had thrown me down. I was trampled on and kicked about until at last a ragged individual picked me up, and, hurrying away with me in his arms, bore off at full speed. I was carried swiftly through the darkness for some time—could not guess whither—soon—a door—three gold balls—several years—never——"

* * * * * * *

At this point the remarks of the picture became broken and unintelligible. Its voice seemed to die away and its features to lose their animation and to return to their early immobility. I suspect that the fact is that I fell asleep, and so lost the remainder of these interesting experiences.

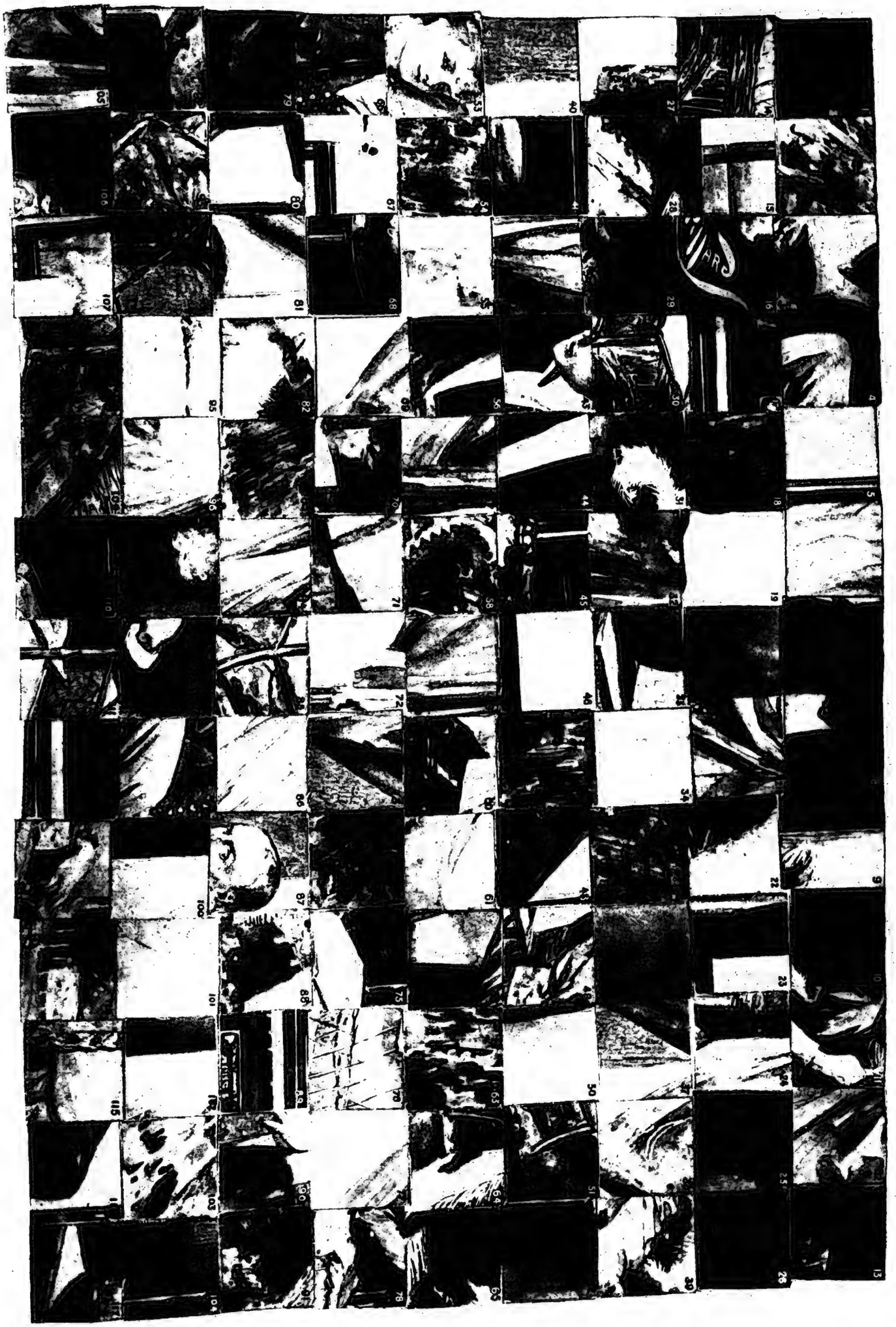
A FIFTY-POUND PRIZE.

ON the opposite page is a Puzzle Picture composed of 117 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

We offer a prize of £50 to the first person who sends the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, the whole of the solutions received at "Pearson's Weekly" Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in any one day will be considered together, so that if two or more correct solutions are included in a day's post, the prize will be divided.

In the event of our receiving no correct solution on or before December 29th, the Fifty-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

Envelopes, containing solutions, to be marked "Puzzle." The result will appear in "Pearson's Weekly."



PICTURE PUZZLE.

(See Opposite Page).

THE POSTMASTER OF PONEY-SUR-LOIRE

By Alfred T. Story.

"SIRE, the good God gave me four sons. Three of them have fallen in the war. I do not begrudge them to our beloved France, and yet all of them were very dear to me! But the fourth, a prisoner in your hands and badly hurt, him I sorely grieve. The others repose in death and are well; he still needs help of the living. And whose help can avail like that of a mother when her son is ailing? Moreover this one, my youngest-born, though ever strong and sturdy, was, when sick, very slow to mend under the care of strangers; and I much fear he will not recover, unless he can have the loving attention that always brings him round. Meseems he is even now sickening for death; for he writes me by the hand of another, although his last letter was written very well with his left.

"Sire, I am a poor lone woman, well-nigh seventy years of age, with none of my own left to help me save a grandson, a small slip of a boy in his tenth year and an orphan. There is no one but him to stand by me in my way down to the common resting-place, and to care for the little vineyard, our sole possession. You, O King, have sons and daughters, and would grieve for them if in peril or pain. Will it please you, in your tender regard for them, to have pity on a poor afflicted mother, and send a last death-spared son to comfort and sustain her in her loneliness and grief? For even to see him in his wounds, and to do my best to heal them, would be a comfort to your humble servant.

"Though it is said my son wounded and killed some of your soldiers, it was only done by him, a soldier, in defence of his country. Of himself, from his youth up, he was ever the quietest of souls, and would not hurt so much as the humblest creature. But with some love of France is a passion, and in that my son Jean took after his father. Nor could I, his mother, wish it otherwise, though your Majesty may take my word for it—if sent home he would never more raise hand against your people.

"Sire, in the hope of your royal clemency,

"I subscribe myself your humble servant,

"Camille Collignon."

This letter had been written about a week—and so far no answer thereto received—when, in the afternoon of a still September day, the writer, a woman who bore bravely her "well-nigh seventy years," was seated without the porch of an old-fashioned country house, amid the vineyards and farms of the beautiful Loire Valley. It was a lowly habitation, bespeaking honest poverty, albeit far removed from want. It showed no indications of carelessness or neglect, those sure tokens of the inferior mind, but rather the reverse. The roses that had been trained to clamber round the little casements, and shed their rich perfume about the place like a benediction, were well kept and tended; while the wisteria that flung its rich purple blossoms over the porch, and even to the windows of the high-pitched roof, showed signs of a restraining and cherishing hand.

A lordly elm covered a grateful space with shade, and served as a refuge for numberless birds. In the refreshing cool of its leafy pyramid the elderly dame sat in front of her spinning-wheel, whose quiet tune, mingling with the dreamy murmurs of the wide-spreading tree, made a pleasant music to the ear.

Over a stretch of sward fronting the house, and planted here and there with fruit trees, some of their branches drooping low with their luscious burden, a motherly hen was leading a numerous brood; while a couple of goats cropped the rough herbage. Upon the acliivity behind the house the vines were hanging with clusters of juicy grapes, almost ready for the wine-press.

The afternoon sun was warm, though not too much so for comfort under the grateful shade of the big elm, and Grandmère Collignon was enjoying it to the full, as she sat there, distaff in hand, spinning the fleecy wool, her thoughts the while wandering far away, trying to picture to herself how her son looked in his distant prison—to her imagination so cold and repellent.

Venerable indeed she looked, the old dame, as she sat there in her rudely-carven high-backed chair, made when it was the fashion for women to sit stiff and straight, with head erect and hands folded demurely on the lap, if not busy with some useful work.

Though her dress was of plain home-spun material, grey of hue and coarse, and her hands were skinny and brown with rude and unceasing toil, yet was there something about her face, and especially about her brave French eyes, shining like jewels beneath her high-starched cap, that gave a touch of nobility to her appearance.

A rough, hairy dog came from the house into the porch. Madame heard the stir he made behind her, and thinking it was her grandson who had been there a little while before, she called out "Dieudonné." But the dog alone responded to the sound of her voice, bounding to her knee with frolic and canine laughter, he said as well as he could: "Command me, madame; anything in my power I will do for you—run, bark, wag my tail, eat, chase the cat—anything." But his mistress had no use for him just then, and dismissed him with a brief: "Va t'en avec tes grimaces; tu n'es pas Dieudonné, toi!" (Get away with your grimaces, you are not Dieudonné).

The dog, judging his mistress to be in no sympathetic mood, tried the goats, but they, equally disinclined for play, showed him two pairs of horns, and so, after this second rebuff, he took himself off, to seek more agreeable company elsewhere, while the spinster again sent her thoughts roaming after her absent son.

She was murmuring to herself: "I wonder if there is anyone in those parts who will have a thought for the poor boy's shirts and stockings—he who was ever so unhappy if they wanted mending," when, of a sudden, she heard the tramping of hoofs upon the road, and turning her head, beheld a troop of horsemen draw up at the gate.

They were soldiers, and wore the uniform of the enemy. Their presence was nothing new to her; they had for some time held all that part of the country. Nor did they cause her any alarm, being ever orderly and molesting no one.

A poor fellow whom she knew belonged to Poney-sur-Loire, and who had doubtless guided them to the house, pushed open the gate; whereupon three of the soldiers—by the uniform they wore, and their orders and trappings, evidently officers of high rank—entered and rode to where Madame Collignon was at work.

She rose on their approach. They saluted, and one of them asked:

"You are Madame Collignon, I believe?"

"Oui, monsieur."

"The mother of Jean Collignon, at present a prisoner of war?"

"Oui, monsieur."

The speaker drew a large envelope from the breast of his uniform, and said: "You wrote to His Majesty the King respecting your son?"

"Oui, monsieur."

"I have the honour to hand you His Majesty's reply, madame," giving her the missive. Pale and trembling with emotion, the poor woman took the document, and, breaking the seal with difficulty, unfolded it and read its contents. They were simply to the effect that, considering the number of men in the same predicament as Jean Collignon, His Majesty could not see his way to release him without making invidious distinctions.

The good woman's eyes had scarcely reached the last line ere the paper dropped from her trembling hands, and, turning very pale, she seemed about to fall, seeing which the tallest and stateliest of the officers—a man apparently about thirty-five—hastily dismounted, and came to her assistance. Barely was he by her side, however, ere she recovered her self-possession, and, raising her head, which for a moment had bent over the back of the chair, to which she had clung, she said:

"Je vous remercie, monsieur." (I thank you, sir.)

"Pray be seated, madame," said the officer, whose grave, impassive face, for the brief space seemed to respond to a deepest chord of sympathy. "Our news has upset you; but be assured your son is well cared for—as indeed are all our prisoners."

"But he is so badly wounded," said the mother.

"So are many others—in the same position as himself. But all have the best attention. Short of your own personal care, your son could not be better looked after. For myself, I would that the King could have seen his way to send him home; but you know there are thousands of his countrymen in exactly the same position; and to free him and not them——"

"Would be unjust," said the mother of Jean Collignon, anticipating the officer's words. "I do not wish that. No; all have fought and suffered for our afflicted France, and all should be treated alike."

"That is what we wish to do."

"It is only just, monsieur. I beg your pardon. A mother's heart is selfish, and in my weakness I forgot that there are other sons with fond and anxious parents. Monsieur, I thank you for reminding me of my weakness. I would not have it thought," she added proudly, "that I begrudge any sacrifice for France—notre belle France." After a brief pause she continued, a tender moisture again dimming the brightness of her eyes: "I only thought that, if Jean must die, he might as well die under his mother's roof."

"There is no fear of that, I believe," replied the officer. "He may not, as I understand, recover the use of his arm; but he will most likely live to be a comfort to you for many a day to come."

"Dieu soit béni!" she murmured, again grasping the back of the chair, by which she had continued to stand.

"Pray be seated, madame, and tell me how this affair happened," said the officer, wishing to give a new direction to her thoughts. "Our people can hardly comprehend it."

Smoke

The Celebrated

"PIONEER"

SWEETENED TOBACCO.

Known all over the World.

MANUFACTURED BY THE

RICHMOND CAVENDISH CO. LTD.,

At their Bonded Works, **LIVERPOOL.**

SOLD BY ALL FIRST-CLASS TOBACCONISTS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

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HOLLOWAY'S PILLS & OINTMENT

BEAR A MAGNIFICENT RECORD

From thousands who have written, testifying to the wonderful cures effected by them in almost every known ailment and disease.

THE PILLS

Invigorate the Nerves, Strengthen the Stomach, and Promote healthy action of the Liver. They Cure Headache, Indigestion, Complaints of the Kidneys, Flatulency, Loss of Appetite and Low Spirits, and are especially recommended for Females of all ages.

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To sufferers from Bad Breasts, Bad Legs, Old Wounds, Rheumatism, Sciatica, Piles, Fistulas, and every form of Skin Disease.

It allays inflammation and irritation, and when used in conjunction with the Pills, according to directions accompanying each box and pot, it is irresistible in its marvellous curative powers.

MANUFACTURED ONLY AT

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BE SURE TO CUT

IT WILL

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GIVEN AWAY!

Guaranteed Genuine Bargains.

THIS PHENOMENAL OFFER is made to the readers of *Pearson's Weekly Christmas Number* only. On receipt of Postal Order for **6/-** or **74** stamps, we will forward DIRECT FROM OUR LOOMS to your address, one of our **10/6** genuine **SEAMLESS, WOVEN, REVERSIBLE TAPESTRY CARPETS,** suitable for Drawing-room, Dining-room, Bedroom, &c., handsomely bordered and woven in thirty different patterns and art colourings to suit all requirements, and *large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room.* These carpets will be sold as an advertisement for the goods of the British Carpet Weaving Company *Below the Actual Cost of Production.* They are made of material equal to wool, and, being a specialty of our own, can only be obtained Direct from our Looms, thus saving the purchaser all Middle Profits. Over 200,000 sold during the past twelve months.

GIVEN AWAY.

With every Carpet we shall ABSOLUTELY GIVE AWAY a very handsome RUG to match, or we will send TWO CARPETS and TWO RUGS for *10s. 6d.*

MONEY WILLINGLY RETURNED IF NOT APPROVED.

Thousands of Repeat Orders and Unsolicited Testimonials Received.

"St. Peter's, Jersey. Rev. P. M. [illegible] St. Joseph's, Chasetown, Walsall, writes: "Goods duly to hand safely, and must say that I am delighted [illegible] who has seen the Carpets and the value given. I myself very [illegible] them, and shall do my utmost to recommend them. Rugs [illegible] the bargains I have obtained." I really do not know however they could be made [illegible] for the money.—Yours truly, J. INGLIS."

SPECIAL NOTE. This offer is made to the readers of this paper, owing to premises being required by the London County Council for Street Improvements.

All Goods must be Cleared, Regardless of Cost.

All orders despatched same day as received. Cheques and Postal Orders to be crossed "Union Bank," and made payable to J. Hyman [illegible] (Estab. 1872.) Address

GIGANTIC REMOVAL SALE

OF OUR WORLD-RENOWNED

BRUSSELETTE CARPETS.

ADMITTEDLY THE CHEAPEST IN THE WORLD.

Seamless, Woven, and Reversible, Rich Turkey Patterns and Colourings, Superior Quality, with Handsome Border to match, a Marvel of Excellence and Beauty.

SIZES AND PRICES.

No.	ft.	in.		ft.	in.	Sale Price.	Former Price.
1	9	0	by	6	0	5 6	9 0
2	9	0	by	7	6	7 0	11 0
3	9	0	by	9	0	8 6	13 6
4	10	6	by	7	6	8 9	13 9
5	10	6	by	9	0	10 0	15 6
6	12	0	by	9	0	11 6	18 0
7	10	6	by	10	6	12 0	18 6
8	12	0	by	10	6	13 6	20 6
9	15	0	by	9	0	14 3	22 6
10	13	6	by	10	6	15 3	24 0
11	12	0	by	12	0	15 3	24 0
12	13	6	by	12	0	17 0	27 0
13	15	0	by	12	0	19 0	32 0
14	18	0	by	12	0	22 9	36 0

These Carpets are splendid imitations of real Brussels Carpets, the designs having been carefully copied from the originals both as regards colourings and patterns, so that when in use it is almost impossible, except by close scrutiny, to detect the difference. All designs are registered, and deservedly considered works of art. We can confidently recommend them for use in the Dining and Drawing Rooms, or any rooms and landings where hard wear is a necessity.

GIVEN AWAY.

As an advertisement for the introduction of these goods to all Readers of *Pearson's Weekly Christmas Number* we have decided to give away to every purchaser a very handsomely-woven Hearthrug, 6ft. long and 3ft. wide, to match carpets in colours, &c.

Thousands of Repeat Orders and Unsolicited Testimonials Received.

Pateley Bridge.

Mrs. R. DAWSON writes: "I have received the Brusselette Carpets, and am very pleased with them. I think them an excellent imitation of Brussels Carpets, the colours being so rich. Shall be pleased to recommend to my friends."

37, Boston Park Road, Brentford, London, W.

Mrs. H. GRUNDY writes: "I have in use three of your Brusselette Carpets, they are admirable, both as regards colourings and wear; it is really a wonder how such an article can be turned out at the price."

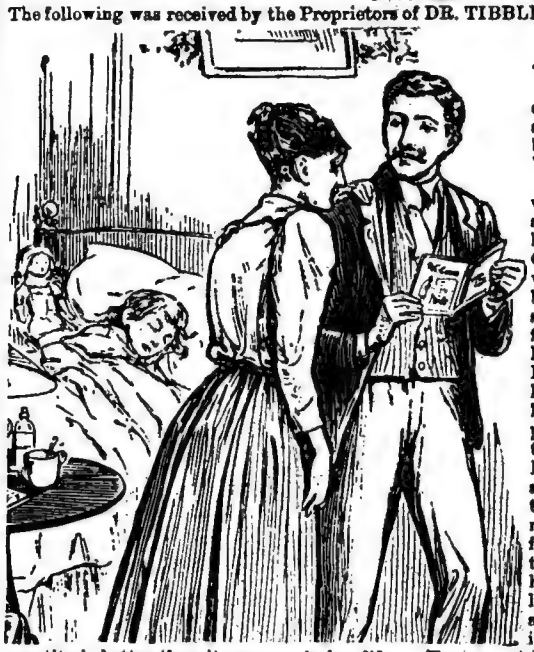
Satisfaction Guaranteed, or Money Willingly Returned.

THE BRITISH CARPET WEAVING CO., 31, Old St., London, E.C.

IT WILL NOT APPEAR AGAIN.

A LITTLE GIRL AND DR. TIBBLES' VI-Cocoa

The following was received by the Proprietors of DR. TIBBLES' VI-COCOA on June 8th, 1897:



"32, Oswin Street, St. George's Road, Southwark, S.E.

"To Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa (Ltd.)

"Dear Sirs,—I trust you will excuse me taking the liberty of addressing you, but I feel I must bear testimony to Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa.

"My little daughter Daisy Ann was six years old last November, and ever since she was born she has suffered with anæmia. Last October she was taken with whooping cough, followed by bronchitis, and then pneumonia set in, and we really began to fear the worst and that we should lose her. During the Christmas Holiday, while I was watching by her bedside during the night, I happened to see one of your pamphlets, and after reading it I said to my wife that we would try Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa. We did so, and the very first cup the child took she remarked, 'Oh, don't that make me feel nice and warm!' and from that time we have continued to use it—in fact, the little girl will have nothing else, and within the last two months she has gained about 7lb. in weight, and her flesh is getting firm and solid. Her appetite is better than it ever was in her life. You are at liberty to make what use you like of this.

"Your thankful servant, HENRY WOODS."

A BUSY MAN AND DR. TIBBLES' VI-Cocoa

Some of us are wise enough to see that the very intellectual superiority of which we boast must of necessity be ministered to by a very different diet to that which appealed to the digestive organs of men who underwent more bodily exertion than the most stalwart navvy or the most muscular prize-fighter of this steam and mach ne-ridden era. The case of Mr. H. Stockland Knight, 21, Stockmore Street, Cowby Road, Oxford, is a good illustration of this fact.

Mr. KNIGHT writes as follows: "I have now made a thorough trial of Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa, and on that account feel somewhat qualified to make a statement as to its excellent qualities. I used at one time to take a good deal of hot and scalding tea, which brought me to a state of great weakness and loss of nerve power. After taking tea I felt quite unable to summon any energy, and totally unfitted for work of any kind. Some four months ago I determined to give up tea altogether, and use Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa instead. I did so, and in a remarkably short space of time I felt greatly benefited. I no longer experienced loss of energy after breakfast or tea, but I found

ITS SUSTAINING PROPERTIES MARVELLOUS,

for it is undoubtedly a food as well as a beverage, a cup of Vi-Cocoa alone being more sustaining than solid food with tea or ordinary cocoa. I have gained in weight, and am better in every way, and am improving daily. I take two cups at breakfast, and the same at tea-time. I would not relinquish it now on any account, as I consider it has in a very great measure restored my impaired health. I may say in conclusion that my business takes me out at all hours of the day and night, making sleep and meal times very irregular. To all those living under such and similar conditions Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa is especially beneficial."

THE BEVERAGE OF THE PEOPLE.

Let us glance at the ordinary breakfast beverages of the people.

TEA, even if properly infused, is only a stimulant. It is not a nourishing beverage, and as usually decocted, is washy, trashy, and deleterious.

COFFEE, even when of the best, and prepared in perfection as you will find in the East, where Mohammedans are forbidden by their religion to use alcohol, is only a cardiac or heart stimulant. It increases for a short time the power of that organ without being in any sense of the word a nourishing beverage.

COCOA.—The ordinary cocoa is not by any means a nourishing beverage. Its good qualities either in the English or Foreign varieties are smothered in starch and sugar that induce or promote indigestion.

DR. TIBBLES' VI-COCOA is a nourishing beverage, containing four great restorers of vitality: Cocoa, Kola, Hops, and Malt. It stands out as a builder-up of tissues, a promoter of vigour, and in short it has all the factors which make robust health. Being a deliciously flavoured beverage, it pleases the most fastidious palate. Its active powers of diastase give tone to the stomach, and promote the flow of gastric juice, and however indigestible the food taken with it at any meal, it acts as a solvent and assimilative.

Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa, 6d., 9d., and 1s. 6d. Can be obtained from all chemists, grocers, and stores, or from Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa Limited, 60, 61 and 62, Bunhill Row, London, E.C.

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"94, Commercial Road, Peckham, July 12th.

"Dear Sir,—I am a poor hand at expressing my feelings, but I should like to thank you. Your Lozenges have done wonders in relieving my terrible cough. Since I had the operation of 'Tracheotomy' (the same as the late Emperor of Germany, and unlike him, thank God, I am still alive) performed at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, no one could possibly have had a more violent cough; it was so bad at times that it quite exhausted me. The mucus, which was very copious and hard, has been softened, and I have been able to get rid of it without difficulty.—I am, sir,

"Yours truly, J. Hill."

A DOCTOR'S TESTIMONY.
A DOCTOR'S TESTIMONY.
A DOCTOR'S TESTIMONY.

"Routh Park, Cardiff, South Wales, Sept. 28th, 1893.

"I have, indeed, great pleasure in adding my testimony to your excellent preparation of Cough Lozenges, and I have prescribed it now for the last eight years in my hospital and private practice, and found it of great benefit. I often suffer from Chronic Bronchitis; your Lozenge is the only remedy which gives me immediate ease. Therefore I certainly and most strongly recommend your Lozenges to the public who may suffer from Catarrh, Bronchitis, Winter Cough, or any kind of Pulmonary Irritation.—Yours truly,

"A. GABRIEL, M.D., L.R.C.P. and L.M., Edinburgh.
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"Will you not take a seat, monsieur?" (Pointing to a chair near to hers.) "I beg your pardon for keeping you standing so long."

"Bitte!" replied the officer. Then, having followed her example and taken a seat, he said:

"I believe your son was postmaster of Poncy-sur-Loire."

"Yes, he had held the position for many years."

"And how came he to be defending the place alone?"

"When the news arrived that the Prussians were coming, everybody left in the village—and they were only the old men, the women and children—took what they could and fled. But my son could not go away."

"Why not?" asked the officer.

"He had his duty to perform. The military at Orleans, or at Blois, I forget which, ordered him to hold the post as long as he could, and Jean is one who would do the thing that was set him to do though it cost him his life. We taught them all, their father and I, that such was the duty of men."

"It was a brave and noble teaching," responded the officer, his grave face again illumined by a ray of sympathetic interest. "But tell me more about the affair."

"He telegraphed to the military headquarters that the enemy were near, and they instructed him what to do. He was to send them all the information he could of the whereabouts and movements of the enemy, and to hold the place as long as he could; then, before leaving, he must destroy the telegraphic instrument. It was about nightfall when the Prussians reached the hamlet."

"Yes," said the officer, "and what happened then?"

Grandmère Collignon passed her hand across her brow; then, after reflecting for a moment, she said, turning her frank, brown eyes upon the officers with a smile: "Ah, messieurs, one's memory gets older as one grows in years."

Painter could hardly have imagined a more telling scene for his brush than that which presented itself at the moment when those grand officers bowed low, and with no mock reverence, in acknowledgment of the poor peasant woman's remark. What a contrast she formed, in her homely garb, with her brown, wrinkled face and fine eyes under her penthouse of a cap, to the noble-looking man in front of her, with his calm, sedate countenance, aged as it appeared at times, with deep traits of sadness. By the side of these two were the still mounted officers in their brilliant uniforms. Behind, and as it were filling in the picture, was the boy Dieudonné,* the orphaned grandson, hanging back shyly in the porch, yet eager with a boy's insatiable curiosity to see and hear all.

"Yes, my faculties grow rusty with age," Grandmère Collignon continued. "But there is Dieudonné—he will tell you what happened."

Madame looked round to the left, thinking the youth was in the house; but he had crept out during the interview, and had now advanced to the back of her chair on the right. He answered:

"Me voici, grandmère."

"Ah, there you are!" (turning about). "Tell the officer what happened at the post-office when your uncle Jean was taken. He was present, monsieur; only they did not take him prisoner."

An almost imperceptible smile passed over the lips of the grave soldier. The idea of his people taking so small a prisoner—a man of ten summers—was titillating to the sense of humour.

"So you helped your uncle to defend the post-office?" said the officer to the boy.

"I was with him, Monsieur le Prince!"

The calm, thoughtful eyes of the officer showed a gleam of surprise as the boy thus answered. He was small in size, with good brown eyes like his grandmother's, fine, closely-cropped hair, and a well-filled-out forehead, dressed in a coloured shirt and knickerbockers, with a sash about his waist. Madame Collignon looked at him in astonishment; then, casting an inquiring glance at the officer, she rose from her seat and bowed with a naturalness and a grace that comes with the ease of breaking eggs to a woman of Central France.

The Prince—for Dieudonné had rightly discerned that it was the Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia (afterwards to be Emperor for so brief a space) who addressed him—the Prince rose at the same time and bowed in return. Then, begging her to resume her seat, he did the same, and, turning once more to the boy, he said:

"Tell me now what happened when the soldiers came."

"Uncle told me I had better come home," replied Dieudonné, hardly knowing where to begin.

"But you asked him to let you stay?" put in the grandmother.

"Yes, and he said if I would promise to keep in the corner out of the way I might stop."

"And what happened then?" asked the Prince.

"He sent a message to say the Prussians were coming."

"Yes" (from the Prince).

"Then in a little while the instrument began click-clicking a reply. It said: 'Give us all information you can about movements, force of the enemy; hold office as long as possible; when compelled to retire render instrument useless.'"

"Your uncle told you that such was the reply?"

"No, Monsieur le Prince, I heard it myself."

"You understood what it said?"

"Oui, Monsieur."

The Prince looked at Madame Collignon, who answered the query in his eyes by saying:

"The boy spent much time with his uncle, who is very fond of him, and who taught him to read the instrument."

"Well, and what happened then?" he asked the boy.

"The Germans came very soon after that—Uncle caught sight of them as they came down the hill. He had barricaded the door; also the windows as well as he could, but left loopholes to fire through. He had two chassepots—his own and father's; and when they were half-way down the hill he fired. They came to a halt in the middle of the road for a minute or two; but when he fired again they moved under cover, most of them taking shelter in Veuve Gaidon's orchard. Of those that first appeared I counted thirty, and others afterwards came over the hill and joined them; but it was then so nearly dark that we could not make out the number distinctly."

"Then," said the Prince, "you were watching them?"

"Not after that," replied Dieudonné, "for just then several shots were fired, and they came so near that uncle bade me lie down closely under the instrument table and keep perfectly quiet. But I could see much as he stood by the window, especially when the moon began to shine; and I could hear the messages he sent to Orleans, and the answers that came back. He telegraphed that there appeared to be about fifty Prussians, but, as they seemed to imagine the building was held by a number, he thought he might keep them at bay for an hour or two."

"And the answer?"

"It came, click-click, click-click, amid a volley of shot from the Prussians, which smashed every bit of glass in the windows. Uncle did not catch it properly, and he said to me: 'What say they, Donné?' 'Hold out as long as you can by all means. We are sending troops; they will probably reach you by midnight,' said I, for I had heard it well. Uncle sent back the reply: 'Will do my best so long as ammunition lasts,' working the instrument with his left hand, while he fired with his right. He fired rapidly one shot after another, and the volleys in return came very quickly. Once I saw him recoil, and I said: 'Are you hurt, uncle?' but he said: 'It is nothing, Donné.'

"For a time it was very warm work," the boy continued, his eyes lighting up to brilliance and his action becoming very animated under the recollection of that eventful night. "I asked uncle if I might put the cartridges in for him, and he said I might if I would keep under cover. So I crept nearer to him, and I helped him. After a while he was hit again, and he said: 'I fear, Donné, they are going to do for me; but never mind, it is near midnight, and then, I hope we shall have help.'

"But just then, during a lull, came a violent click-clicking of the instrument. It said: 'Troops intercepted; can't get up before morning; retire and destroy instrument if too hotly pressed.' Uncle replied: 'Can hold out yet a while if useful.' All the reply he got was: 'C'est impossible à ———.' We asked for a completion of the message; but nothing came. After a little we tried again—with the same result.

"Then, when about an hour later uncle made the attempt for the third time, without success, he said he feared some misfortune must have happened; and he did not know whether it was worth while holding out any longer. 'And yet,' said he, 'they telegraphed that help might come by morning.'

"It wanted still an hour of daybreak when, the attack having become fiercer than ever, uncle said: 'I fear, Dieudonné, we must close the book. But first of all I will make the machine useless to them.'

"Then he began to unscrew it, and to damage the fittings, so that they could not be put together again. It took him some time, for he had to keep firing to hold the enemy in check. At last, just as he had finished pulling the ticker to pieces, he received another shot in his right arm. It fell helpless by his side, and he said: 'Ah, Donné, it is all over now!'

"Then he told me to tie a piece of white rag to a stick, and to go to the upper window and hold it out, but to be careful not to expose myself."

"And what happened then?" asked the Prince, greatly interested in the boy's intelligent recital.

"They soon caught sight of the signal, and ceased firing," Dieudonné replied. "Then an officer approached with a white flag and stood in the moonlight in front of the house. Uncle told him we were prepared to surrender on conditions. The officer withdrew, but presently returned with the captain and a number of men.

"'The only condition I can allow,' said the captain, 'is that you surrender yourselves prisoners at discretion.'

"'You except children, of course?' said uncle.

"'Children certainly,' replied the captain.

"'Bien,' said uncle, and with that he threw open the door and stepped out into the moonlight. I followed him.

"'Where are the others?' asked the captain.

"'We are the whole garrison, monsieur,' uncle replied.

"Another officer stepped forward and eyed uncle all over by the light of a lantern."

"The officer looked astonished and said: 'You two?'

"'Oui, monsieur,' said uncle, saluting with his left hand.

"The officer saluted in return, and said: 'I regret, Monsieur le commandant du garrison, that I must treat you as a prisoner of war; the remainder of the garrison goes free. Surgeon, I think the prisoner needs your services.'

"As he said this another officer stepped forward and eyed uncle all over by the light of a lantern. I then saw that he was wounded in several places, that his forehead was covered with blood, and that his right arm was shattered and hung useless by his side. And so they took him away."

"And I dare say you would willingly have gone with him," observed the Prince, pleased with the boy's naïve way of telling the story.

"Oui, Monsieur le Prince, but for the duty he laid upon me."

"Which was?"

"He said that, as grandmother's own sons had all been sacrificed to the needs of France, I must now be a man for grandmother's sake."

"It is indeed plain, Dieudonné, that thou *art* a gift of God," returned the Prince, placing his gauntleted hand upon the boy's head. Then turning to Grandmère Collignon, he said: "Madame, I would gladly return so brave a son to the side of so devoted a mother, and I will do my best for him and for you. But we none of us can do all we would." So saying he rose. "In any case," he continued, "be assured that your son will in every respect have the greatest care and attention."

Grandmère had risen with him, and was saying: "God's blessing be upon you, Monsieur le——," when an orderly hastily rode up with a dispatch. It was given to one of the officers, who handed it straightway to the Prince. He ran his eye over it, and then said:

"Madame, I am pleased to say that your heart's desire is already granted. The order has been given for the release of Jean Collignon, and he is even now on his way home. But it is the act, not of the King, but of your own Government, which, recognising the signal devotion and heroism of your son, has exchanged two German officers for his release. Madame, I congratulate you, and wish you all happiness in his speedy return to your side."

So saying, his Royal Highness, who had already remounted, saluted the good and brave woman, and bade her adieu. The two officers did the same. She, however, was too much overcome with emotion to speak, and as they turned to ride away she stood by the old oaken seat, her eyes raised to Heaven, while the tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks.

As the little cavalcade made its way down the path towards the village the Prince observed to his companions: "Had there been in France ten thousand mother-hearts like that good woman's, the story of the war would have been very different."

* The name signifies 'God-given.'

A Closed Account

By Gertrude Donaldson.

THE Yacht Club in Bombay was giving one of its successful entertainments; the *élite* of all circles civil and military had been bidden to a ball, which was in full swing, couples were revolving on the polished floor to the strains of a first-rate band, whilst others, too lazy to dance, were dispersed about the various reception-rooms, chatting, card-playing, etc., as their fancy prompted them. Outside, the light from the open doorways streamed across the garden, which was further illuminated by pretty many-coloured lamps, and showed some groups of other guests strolling up and down talking in low tones, or sitting in cosy corners conversing *tête-à-tête*.

Among these, seated somewhat apart from the rest, were a good-looking, dark-moustached man of about eight-and-twenty years of age, with a handsome, well-dressed woman. Their chairs were placed close to the low stone wall, beyond which the sea lapped gently as the ripples struck the shore, and a bright moon shone overhead, revealing the ships at anchor in the harbour, while it tipped the tiny waves with silver here and there.

"Pardon me, I did not wreck their happiness."

"Do you know, Captain Woodward, I begin to think you are a very conceited as well as a very heartless man. Do you mean to tell me that it is really your proud boast that you have already wrecked the happiness of two unsuspecting persons, and that it is your intention to repeat this reprehensible conduct whenever the opportunity comes in your way?"

"Pardon me, I did not wreck their happiness; I merely tested the sincerity of the love which they were sufficiently deluded to imagine they felt for one another. My theory is that half the girls who get engaged do so because they are persuaded to it by their match-making mammas; possibly the desire to appear of special consequence in the estimation of less fortunate spinsterhood has something to do with it, and doubtless there are other equally absurd reasons known only to the vagaries of the feminine mind.

"In my opinion they are very seldom influenced by the all-important consideration that they should be absolutely and absorbingly devoted to the man they intend to wed, which is the one and only true essential, you will agree with me, if they hope to be happy, after the first excitement and novelty of married life is past. So I have bound myself by a mental vow to undertake a crusade against inexpedient marriages, and do all that I can to mar instead of make them, and it seems to me there is but one way to achieve this result."

"And that is?"

"To make love to the innocent and deluded victims myself."

"Upon my word! And you dare to assert that you consider yourself so irresistible that you have only to come and be seen, to conquer. You may justify such a course to yourself, and say you are acting kindly and worthily in endeavouring to rescue these poor girls from the fate towards which they are ignorantly tending; but let me tell you that, as you can't explain your theory to the general public as you have to me, there are some people who will give you credit for a very different motive, and you will get called hard names before your well-meant efforts have attained their desired end. If you will forgive me for speaking plainly, let me advise you to mind your own business, and leave the engaged couples alone, or you will get yourself into a mess that you won't find easy to get out of."

"That's just what I am doing—minding my own business. I make it my business, and find it extremely interesting and amusing. Now, for example, take Miss Aynsley, who is just engaged to young Delacroix in her father's regiment. She is a pretty girl, clever and refined, full of health and spirits, ready to enjoy life and make it worth the living, but not a bit the wife for Delacroix, who is a weak sort of creature, amiable, well meaning, but unmistakably an ass. But his father's rich, and by-and-bye he'll get the dibs, and know how to spend them too.

"That fellow has no more notion of the value of money than a baby. He's been accustomed all his life to have what he wanted for the asking, and thinks it fine to chuck away money right and left—racing, gambling, and playing the fool generally all round. But Mrs. Aynsley knows he has good prospects, and so she's determined her daughter shall marry this boy, and the boy is attracted by continual flattery and by the freshness and prettiness of the young lady, and is easily persuaded to propose. He's in earnest—very much so, too; but Gertrude Aynsley isn't, and if they marry she'll find out, as so many others do, that she has made a mistake. But I don't mean to let the marriage take place if I can help it. What do you bet it isn't broken off within the next three months, Mrs. Crothers?"

"I won't take such a bet; I think these things are too serious to jest about."

"I'm not jesting, I mean every word I say."

"Then take care, or some day if you are so meddlesome you will burn your fingers. Far better leave people to manage their own affairs; it's dangerous to try experiments with fate. But there is Colonel Aynsley looking for me. I was engaged for this square with him, and I am afraid I've missed it. Take me to him and I'll do him a good turn to make amends for cutting his dance. I shall warn him that he has an enemy in his camp, one who has sworn to bring disappointment and destruction on the happy anticipations of his wife and child."

"Ah, come now, you won't betray me, I'm sure. It was all in strictest confidence, you know," and rising they strolled across the lawn to meet the Colonel, who had just discovered his errant partner coming towards him.

Mrs. Crothers was one of the most popular women in Bombay. She held a high position there as the wife of a senior civilian, and was therefore one of the leaders of society, where she was deservedly appreciated by all and sundry, for her charming and agreeable manners, and the *savoir faire* with which she fascinated her own sex as well as the other which is less difficult to please. Of the latter she had her own small number of admirers, a certain few who were always in attendance, but of whom she was careful not to favour one above another. And in this she showed her wisdom, for the tongue of scandal is ever ready in these colonial cities to attack the reputation of any woman who is fair to see, and takes a prominent place in the circle in which she moves. And it requires some diplomacy for a *belle dame* to so rule the devotion of her squires as to escape a breath of calumny. Among these privileged few Captain Woodward believed himself to have been admitted, but he had not been long in Bombay, and still felt that he was only on approval with the lady, and must step warily if he wished to continue on the same terms. What he had said about Gertrude Aynsley's engagement to young Delacroix dwelt in her mind, and, on the strength of it, she thought she would try to find out whether he had judged the situation aright.

So about a fortnight after the conversation recorded above, a three-cornered missive was dispatched to Colaba, inviting her friend to a chat and tiffin on the following day.

The tiffin was duly discussed, and the ladies, having enveloped themselves in loose wrappers, were ensconced in bamboo chairs in the shady verandah, prepared for their afternoon rest. They were a marked contrast in appearance, Mrs. Crothers was tall and fair, a beauty of the thorough English type; Gertrude was of medium height, but very slender, with dark brown hair waving low on her forehead, and soft brown eyes, a naturally warm complexion which was already fading somewhat from the heat of India, leaving her a little too pale, but without the sallowness which so often depreciates the attractiveness of brunettes. As she lay back she looked pensively before her for several minutes, entirely forgetful of the presence of her friend.

"A penny for your thoughts! About Charlie Delacroix, of course; that goes without saying."

"No, Blanche; I wasn't thinking of him exactly just then. I was remembering something Captain Woodward said to me the other day on the Bund."

"Captain Woodward! Beware of him, he is a born cynic and a dangerous man What did he say, dear?"

"Well, he said no woman ought to marry till she's five-and-twenty; that they don't know their own minds before then. He said he was sorry to hear of my engagement. He is the only man who has not congratulated me. What does he mean?"

"Well, you know, Gertie, you are rather young, but, on the other hand, you are wise for your age, and even at nineteen I give you credit for knowing your own mind better than most women of five-and-twenty."

"That's just it; I'm afraid I do. I wish—don't think it strange if I say something to you; you know all about it, and I'm sure you'd give me good advice. I can't ask mother; somehow, I never feel as if I could confide in her. She's not that sort."

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Model 653.—Full Skirt, neat Bodice, shaped back. Fancy braid is inserted between **14/9** cash set of tucks; collar and cuffs to match. Price 14/9 only. Safe packed and carriage paid 1/- extra.

COLOURS in which all costumes are supplied: **Black, Sage, Ruby, Navy, Myrtle, Grey, Cinnamon, Electric, Reseda, Brown, Purple, and Fawn.**

SIZES IN STOCK are 34, 36, 38 inches round bust (under arms). Skirts being 38, 40, 42 inches long in front. Larger or special sizes made to measure, 1/6 extra.

Model 805.

A well cut tight-fitting bodice, trimmed velvet, and fancy buttons. Tailor made skirt with three box-pleats. Price for complete Costume, **13/9**. Sent safe packed in leather board box and carriage paid for 1/- extra.

THREE GOLD MEDALS awarded for Excellence of Design, Material, Make, and Finish.

FIVE FAMOUS FABRICS.

I. John Noble New Costume Coating, smooth surfaced, good wearing, light weight, 52in. wide. Full Dress Length 6yd for **7/6**.

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IV. John Noble New Mixture Suiting, specially suited for out-door wear and cycling and touring costumes (all shades), 52in. wide. Full Dress 6yd. for **9/-**.

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Model 651.

THE NEW JOHN NOBLE COSTUME SKIRT. The John Noble New Costume Skirt (all colours) is tailor-made and carefully finished in Cheviot Serge or Costume Coating, with three rows of fancy stitching at the foot. Sizes: 38, 40, 42 inches long in front. Price only **6/6**. Larger or special sizes 1/- extra to measure. Carriage 6d.

There is no more serviceable and economical garment to be bought than this skirt, which always looks well and wears still better. Also made in John Noble Homespun, **9/6**, or Amazon Cloth, **7/11**.

Model 804.—A very pretty new mode with well cut full fronted bodice trimmed cross bars of fancy braid. A well made **13/9** tailor skirt in latest design. Price for complete Costume, only **13/9**. Sent safe packed in leather board box and carriage paid for 1/- extra.

Model 651.

A very tasteful and well cut Bodice and Bolero. Full wide Tailor-made Skirt. Price **13/9**. Sent safe packed in leather box and carriage paid 1/- extra.

6/6

These Costumes are tastefully set off by one of John Noble's Knitted "Tam o' Shanters," or Wool "Pirate" caps, supplied in shades of Cardinal, Navy, Drab, and Sky, at One Shilling each. Ladies' Tam o' Shanters also supplied at same price.

Model 806.—A tasteful well-cut Costume. Bodice trimmed fancy braid. Tailor made skirt, with three box-pleats. Price for complete **14/9** Costume only 14/9. Sent safe packed in leather board box, and carriage paid for 1/- extra.

Model 822.—An up-to-date Guinea Chesterfield Suit, thoroughly well made and finished throughout in the latest **21/-** tailor mode. The skirt is full, and has three box-pleats. The Coat is the newest shape, trimmed round pearl buttons and fancy stitching. Complete Costume sent safely packed in leather board box and carriage free for One Guinea.

THE JOHN NOBLE KNOCKABOUT FROCK FOR GIRLS.

1/6 *"An Ideal School or Holiday Garment for Girls."* **1/6**

Made with saddle top and pocket.

Sizes and Prices:

21	24	27	30	33	36	39 in.
1/6	2/-	2/6	3/-	3/6	4/-	4/6 ea.

6d. extra for every 3in. longer. Carriage 4d.

Model 645.—Popular and serviceable Costume, with saddle top, loose bloomer skirt, full sleeves, pretty trimmed with gold braid.

Sizes and Prices:

21	24	27	30	33	36
2/9	3/4	4/-	4/9	5/-	6/3

Carriage paid 6d. extra.

Model 648. A young ladies' Costume. Choice of New Cloths in the newest colours, trimmed fancy braid and slashed sleeves. Well made throughout.

Large size of Prices:

34	36	38	40	42	46 in.
6/11	7/11	8/11	9/11		

Carriage paid 6d. extra.

WINTER DRESS FABRICS. The choicest in Plain and Fancy, as in the Newest Colours. Prices from 4d. to 4/6 per yard. **A BOX of 1,000 PATTERNS**, Homespuns and Wool Mixtures, Fancy Cloths, Serges, Tweeds, Serges, 1000 different Mixtures, Velveteen, &c., sent to select from, and sent carriage paid.

John Noble Ltd. have no agents, and are not represented by any firms in London or elsewhere.

CHRISTMAS, 1897.

JOHN NOBLE LTD. Largest Firm of Costumiers in the World, and Originators of Half-Guinea Costumes, return hearty thanks to their vast clientele (now exceeding 1,000,000 regular customers), resident in all parts of the known world, and respectfully wish them

THE SEASON'S GREETINGS,

and hope that they will speak as favourably of, and recommend, the Firm's Manufactures in the future as they so kindly have done during the past 28 years.

SPLITTING HEADACHES

Daisy is a wonderful cure.—J. R. COURTNEY, 2, Ushers Island, Dublin.

Our customers find Daisy wonderful in its effects.—WILLIAMS' DRUG STORES, 91, Hoxton Street, London, W.

I find Daisy a splendid thing for headache.—THOS. LORRAINE, 22, Dolhouse Lane, West Glasgow.

I cannot speak too highly of Daisy, I found relief almost instantly.—R. WILLIAMS, C. B. Post Office, Birkenhead.

I have tried your famous remedy, and found it marvellous for headache.—E. G. DONNE, 112, Tinth Place, Dublin.

I have found Daisy to be as you state, and splendid for headache.—D. K. BLAKE, Oil Mill House, Wisbech, Cams

Thanks so much. They are so very useful in headache. M. VOSE, Hartford, Richmond, Yorks

Daisy almost instantly cured me.—W. P. MARSHALL, Queen Street, Morley.

Daisy is a boon to sufferers. I found relief, I might say, instantly from neuralgia, from which I have greatly suffered.—Mrs. D. SPENCER, 4, West View, Side Copse, Otley

Daisy has done me more good than anything else I have ever tried for headache. Yesterday I went with a party for an outing. During the afternoon one of the ladies had a most splitting headache; I gave her a Daisy, and in 5 minutes she was surprised to find herself cured.—A. GAMMON, Highland House, St. Thomas Road, Hastings.

I have been a sufferer from severe headache for some years, and have never been able to get anything to cure in a few minutes except Daisy.—LEWIS H. HALSE, Ichburgh School House, Mundford, Norfolk.

Daisy gave almost instant relief. Please send eighty Daisies by return of post.—Miss EDWARDS, Darracott, Georgeham, Braunton, Devon.

Daisy is a grand cure for bad headache. I sold a box to a friend, and she said it was a treat to find something that really cured.—E. SMITH, Oak Cottage, Old Windsor, Berks

A friend gave me a Daisy and it acted as if by magic.—(Rev.) HUGH JONES (Baptist Minister), St. Dogmacho, Cardigan, S. Wales

Found Daisy excellent.—S. W. BUSH, 438, Hornsey Road, London.

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FREE.

To give you the opportunity of PROVING Daisy, we hereby promise to send you Half-a-Dozen Daisies Free. Yourself and your friends will be delighted with them. Send a stamped addressed envelope, mention "Pearson's Weekly," and they shall be sent Gratis by return of post. The proof of the pudding is the eating thereof.

The same Household will not be supplied Twice with Gratis Daisy.

Most respectable Chemists sell single Daisies at One Penny Each, Ten Daisies for 7½d., or Twenty Daisies for 1s. 1½d. We send the latter size post free.

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TWIN DAISY WORKS, LEEDS.

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Daisy has been such a good friend to me and my friends, it has become a household word.—Mrs. COLLETT, 13, Tower Ramparts, Ipswich.

One night I was almost beside myself with pain in the teeth. All in a moment I thought of Daisy, and the effect of one dose was truly wonderful.—Miss E. SEYMOUR, Auckland Villas, Dennis Road, East Molesey, Surrey.

I came home with a splitting headache; before getting tea I took a Daisy, and before the meal was half way through it cured it.—A. S. BROWNE, 36, Moss Lane, Aintree.

Sweet little Daisy, dear little Daisy.—J. M. LITTLE, Nithsdale Gardens, Glasgow

Daisies are worth 6d. each.—Mrs. S. HUTCHINS, Police Station, Bruton, Bath.

I had not had a whole night's rest for eight weeks. A Daisy gave instant relief. My mother says she has never known in twenty years' experience such a rapid cure for neuralgia. You have my heartfelt thanks. You may print my name but please omit my address.—W. S. MILES, Berks.

Daisy is the best remedy for headache I have ever tried in my life.—Mrs. PULLAN, 3, King Edward Street, Liverpool Road, Islington.

Daisy is A1.—H. CARPENTER.

Daisy is selling well, and gives great satisfaction to my customers.—S. DURRANT, Chemist, London, E.

I am pleased with your speciality and your mode of conducting your business.—G. HAMPTON, Chemist, 41, London Road, Reading.

I had been a martyr to neuralgia for six years, and tried ever so many cures (?) but none gave me any relief until I got Daisy.—Miss MARIANNE TROY, Patrick Street, Tramore, Ireland.

I was cycling last Sunday and a terrible headache came on. Fortunately I had a Daisy in my pocket; I called at a wayside inn, and took it in a little water. Quarter of an hour later when I left, the pain was entirely gone, and I have not felt it since.—FRANK BUTTLE, Wolferton, King's Lynn

Daisy is absolutely the best remedy I have ever tried.—E. VINCENT, 5, Belgrave Street, King's Cross.

I found Daisy the best I have tried for severe cases.—C. W. PARKER, 19, Steedman Street, Walworth, London.

SIX MILLION DAISIES SOLD ANNUALLY

"Ask me what you like; your confidence is safe with me. And you may be sure I'll help you if I can."

"You see—Charlie, he's awfully in love with me, and I like him; I really do like him very much; he's so good-natured and so devoted, and so nice in every way. But he's not clever, and he seems so young, and I am afraid—oh, I'm dreadfully afraid—I'm not in love with him. I thought I was until lately—till I was engaged to him—but now I'm sure I'm not. And I can't tell him; it would be no use if I did, for mother would never let me break it off. What shall I do? They would call me a flirt and coquette, and all sorts of horrid names, if I throw him over for no reason, and I should be in such disgrace at home; I could not bear it, I know. But what Captain Woodward said suddenly startled me into thinking that perhaps he is right, and that I gave consent too hastily." The tears had risen to her eyes towards the end of her confession, and she hesitated, her lips trembling as she tried to speak.

Mrs. Crothers was silent for a few moments, considering what she should say. It occurred to her that during the past week or two she had seen less than usual of Captain Woodward at the various places where they had been accustomed to meet, and she had noticed on several occasions that he had been sitting or riding with Gertrude Aynsley whenever her lover was absent from her side. It was evident he meant to carry out his intention of preventing the marriage if he could. Now, she questioned, was his motive as purely impersonal as he had pretended to her in their talk together that night?

"Will you forgive me if, before I venture to advise you, I ask you this? Do you care for anyone else?"

"Anyone else? How could I? Oh, no," but as she said it her eyes dropped before her friend's straight glance, and a faint blush stole to her cheeks for a few seconds.

She knelt beside her chair.

"If there is no one else, I say don't be in a hurry. Wait a little, perhaps you'll get to care more for him, or if you don't, something may happen to give you a *raison d'être* for breaking it off."

"But mother is so impatient to have it all over. She is already imploring me daily to fix the wedding-day, and worries me to set about orders for my trousseau, *now* at once. I have tried to put it off, but she gets angry, and once everything is arranged and bought, I feel as if I can't escape. What can I do? Do help me, dear," and, getting up, she went to Mrs. Crothers and knelt beside her chair as though intreating for her aid.

"I know what we'll do. I have felt tired lately, and I want a change. You look pale, my dear, and I shall tell your mother all this. She has been too much for you, and you must have a rest. You must come with me to the Hills; we'll go away for a month or so, and enjoy ourselves in our own way. Then you can think it over, and if necessary, why I'll talk to your mother and tell her it can't be done. But by that time you may find that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder,' and Charlie Delacroix may get you after all."

"How good of you! I should so like to go. Do you really think that we can manage it? Suppose that mother should say no?"

"Oh, she won't say no, to me. Now, cheer up, that's settled. We'll have tea and go out for a long drive [illegible] love and its bothers for the present."

And Mrs. Aynsley did not say no, though [illegible] have liked to have done so, if it had been possible without the [illegible] Mrs. Crothers, who carried off Gertrude triumphantly to enjoy a few weeks [illegible] from the unwelcome attentions of her lover and restore the roses to her [illegible] with rest and fresh air.

A small gathering of mutual acquaintances came to the railway station to see them off, and as they stood on the platform saying good-bye, Captain Woodward found himself for one moment beside Mrs. Crothers.

"So I was right, she can't face it after all. But I hardly expected to find you converted to my way of thinking so soon."

"Don't count your chickens. You have not won yet, you know."

"Ah, but I mean to," and two minutes afterwards the train was gone.

* * * * * * * * *

The sun was just sinking down below the summit of the highest ridge of hills, tingeing the surrounding country with a golden glory, and throwing a broad shadow on the roads and trees, whose over-spreading branches moved gently in the evening breeze. On one of these many narrow pathways along the edge of the Khud stood two figures, leaning against the railing and watching the narrow rim of roseate sun which was just about to disappear and leave the semi-darkness of a tropical night. Gertrude Aynsley had spent four happy weeks of freedom with her friend, and on the morrow they were to descend to heat and glare, gaiety and rush, and Charlie Delacroix again. Her companion was Captain Woodward, who, with Leslie Crothers, had come up a week previously to spend the last few days with them in the soft, cool atmosphere of the hills.

Mr. Crothers had with difficulty stolen a short holiday from the arduous routine of his official work below, and had invited Captain Woodward to accompany him. Mrs. Crothers was on their arrival somewhat surprised, and rather inclined to resent Captain Woodward's unexpected appearance on the scene, but he had pleaded a sharp attack of fever and her husband's pressing invitation as his excuse for what might otherwise have seemed an intrusion on his part, so she forgave his coming, and although she mistrusted his intentions, appeared satisfied to let him do his worst, for during those few days his acquaintance with Gertrude had advanced rapidly. He was always her escort in walks and rides, and by the eve of their departure, it was evident that she had formed a favourable impression of him and they were fast becoming great friends.

And now she was standing gazing wistfully out over the country which was so soon to fade from her sight, and with it the sense of peace and restfulness that had come to her.

"Do you know that sad little story of what happened some little while ago close by this spot? It was before we came up, but everyone talks about it still. It is strange that nothing has been yet done to make this place more safe."

Her companion shook his head without replying, and she added:

"A tiny child was watching the sunset just as you and I are watching it now, and she ran forward to catch the last glimmer of its rays as it vanished over there; her foot slipped below the railing, and she rolled over and over down to the bottom of the Khud. Poor mite! She was dead when they took her up; she had seen her last sun rise and set. I almost envy her."

A moment's pause, and then he laid his hand on hers, and, looking earnestly in her face, said:

"By that admission you have given me the right to speak, Miss Aynsley. I know what is in your mind, and the trouble of it. You have pledged your word to marry Delacroix and you think you mean to keep it, although you know full well by this time that you do not love him. It will be a fatal error unless you have the strength of mind to withdraw at once. Don't do it, I implore you. Don't think that any good end can result from such a disastrous course. You will only make two persons unhappy instead of one."

As he spoke he had drawn closer to her, and as he stooped over her, she felt his breath upon her cheek.

"Oh, hush," she said, "don't tempt me, I could not break my word."

And she tried to move away from him. Quite suddenly he flung his arms round her, and kissed her on her lips. The blood rushed to her face, and as he let her go, she caught at the railing to steady herself, and her feet slid from under her, so that for a second she was swinging in mid-air. It was but a momentary peril, for knowing her danger, terror gave her the impulse to hold on to the railing with all her strength, and in a minute, Captain Woodward had dragged her back, and placed her safely on terra firma once again, but his face was white as he exclaimed: "Good God, how you frightened me." For a short space neither spoke, she trembling, and he too agitated to think of anything to say. Woman-like, she was the first to recover her equanimity.

"We must go back. Blanche will think we are lost, and it is getting quite dark." Then sinking her voice somewhat she continued: "You know you ought not to have done that. I will try to forgive you, and I will consider what you have said. But don't repeat it, will you? And please, when we go down after to-morrow, keep away from me. I would rather not see you for a little while, if you don't mind."

"I do mind very much, but it shall be as you wish. When you want me, or if I can be of service to you in the future, let me know."

For reply, she held out her hand, and he pressed it silently as they turned into the compound of their bungalow.

* * * * * * * * *

It had been a late night at the mess of —th Fusiliers, and the play had been unusually high. Captain Woodward had been one of the guests, and at the end of the evening had risen the winner of a considerable sum, the chief loser being Charlie Delacroix. That young gentleman had imbibed whiskies and sodas more freely than usual, and although far from being intoxicated, had been sufficiently excited to stake recklessly, so that when they rose from the table he was rather amazed to find how heavily he had lost. He produced his cheque book, and writing out a cheque for the amount he owed, he handed it to Captain Woodward, who put it in his pocket, and was about to enter the *gharry*, which was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, when young Delacroix, who had followed him down, said hurriedly, as they stood for a moment on the last step:

"By the way, Woodward, I should be obliged if you would hold over that cheque for a week or two. I am afraid I have not enough at the bank to meet it at present, but I expect to get a remittance from home shortly, when it will be paid."

"All right, I'll remember," and he drove away.

But within three days the cheque had been presented at the bank, and had been returned to Captain Woodward with the words "no account" written across. He smiled as he put it in his pocket, and the next afternoon, when he started for his ride, he turned his horse

Captain Woodward placed her safely on terra firma once again.

towards the Aynsley's bungalow. Some weeks had passed since they had come down from the hills together, and he had hardly seen Gertrude to speak to since. He respected her wishes, and had abstained from seeking any but a few meetings of a casual kind. Meanwhile there was no sign of her engagement being broken off, and within the last few days it had been rumoured that the wedding-day was fixed. Perhaps it was this report which had prompted him to take desperate measures to gain his end.

He handed the cheque to Captain Woodward.

"The mem sahib was out," the butler said, "but Miss Aynsley would see him." He could not have wished for better luck.

As Gertrude rose and came towards him he was struck with the alteration in her looks. She was much thinner and had dark rings under her eyes, and when the blush faded, which had risen to her face as he entered, she was very pale indeed.

"Mother is out. Will I do instead?" she asked with a smile.

"You will do better. I came to see you to ask you if it is true that your marriage is fixed for next month?"

"It is true," she answered, seating herself at a little distance from him. He walked towards an open window and stood for a moment looking out of it, then turned abruptly, and his words came rapidly from his mouth.

"You can't do it. I won't let you do it. See here, the man's a weak-minded idiot. I'm not sure he's not worse. He isn't fit to tie your shoe-string. Even though it's definitely settled, give it up. I intreat you give it up."

She clasped her hands as if to hide that they were shaking, thus betraying her agitation as she replied:

"I must go through with it. He cares for me and I have no right to break his heart for the sake of my own selfish inclination. He has often said that if anything happened to part me from him he would shoot himself, that he would not live without me. I could not risk that, could I?"

"Shoot himself! Ridiculous! Those who threaten suicide are the last to commit it. He is then a coward, as well as a scoundrel, trying to take advantage of you by working on your fears."

"I believe he means it. And is it generous, do you think, to abuse one who cannot defend himself, Captain Woodward? He may be a weak man, but I should hardly call him a coward, and your last epithet was unpardonable, I think," and in justice to her absent lover, she rose, drawing herself up, indignant in his defence.

He came quickly across to where she stood.

"I used the word advisedly. You are perhaps aware that the debts which men consider it most dishonourable to leave unpaid are those we call our debts of honour. A few days ago I was playing cards and Delacroix was one of the players. He is a gambler, as perhaps you do not know. He lost heavily, and to me. In payment of his losses he handed me a cheque. Here it is"— he had drawn a pocket-book from his coat while speaking, and handing her the slip of paper, he pointed to the fatal words: "No account." She took it from him, glanced at the signature, then saying:

"May I keep this for twenty-four hours?" turned away.

"You will, I trust, give me credit for having acted so far entirely on your behalf. Now, one word for myself. From the first I knew that you could never have really loved that boy, and I determined to save you from yourself. Of late, I confess, another motive has prompted me to come to you. May I tell you what it is?"

"Not now, some other time, perhaps, but not now. I could not bear it now, please go."

He looked at her, hesitating for an instant, then, as he passed her on his way towards the door, he caught her hand and raised it to his lips. As soon as he had left her, Gertrude's fortitude gave way, and she burst into tears—tears of thankfulness and of joy. Thankfulness, that now she had something on which to build the hope of release from her self-imposed bonds; and joy that the man whom she had hardly dared to think of loving, might yet be hers. She looked almost affectionately at the little slip of paper lying in her lap, her reprieve, she thought. Her mother surely could not gainsay that.

• • • • • •

The following evening Mrs. Crothers was sitting writing letters in her boudoir. For once she had a night off from the many claims of society, and her husband was busy getting through some papers, working against time to have them ready for a Council Meeting next day, so she was alone.

A white-turbaned domestic suddenly announced that a sahib was below. Would she receive?

"What sahib?"

"A soldier sahib, he has no card."

"Let him come up," and to her surprise, Charlie Delacroix entered the room. It struck her as she rose to greet him how sad he looked, and how young to think of matrimony.

"Mrs. Crothers, I hope you will forgive me for coming at this hour. Miss Aynsley is a friend of yours, that's why I am here."

"Yes, I trust there is nothing wrong. She is well, I hope?"

"She is well. I have just left Mrs. Aynsley, that is why I have come to you. The fact is—I am in great trouble. She has thrown me over, and perhaps if she could hear the truth of the matter, it might still come right. She would listen to you, if you would help me, although she refuses to see me."

Then he told her the story of the rejected cheque, as it had taken place, and how Captain Woodward had evidently told Gertrude of it, as she believed he had done some dishonourable thing.

"You know, he may not have understood what I said to him, or may have forgotten it; but, anyhow, he should have told me before mentioning it to anyone else. Now it will be difficult to persuade her or anybody that I have not acted like a cad, though, as far as the money goes, he must have known that the debt is quite safe. It is only a question of time for my father to send me whatever I want."

Mrs. Crothers was silent, gravely considering what he had said. Then she spoke:

"Mr. Delacroix, perhaps it is well that you have come to me, though you may not thank me for what I am going to say. With regard to the cheque, I cannot judge Captain Woodward's action in the matter—I don't feel that I am quite in a position to do so, though I think he has not behaved quite fairly to you about that. But it seems to me that if Gertrude loved you as you love her, she would not have been so ready to accept this episode as an excuse to terminate her engagement to you. Now I am going to speak very plainly to you, for I think for both your sakes it is better so. Gertrude does not love you. I am in her confidence, and I know. She would have married you, because she thought that, having promised, she ought not to draw back. But she does not love you, and has longed to be released."

He stared at her fixedly for a moment as though he could not grasp the meaning of what she said. Then he rose and came towards her.

"Is this true? Can it really be the truth?"

"She told me so herself."

"Then nothing matters any more. Good-night, Mrs. Crothers, I am sorry to have troubled you."

She said nothing as he turned and went away, for a sudden, strange look in his eyes disturbed her, the same look that is seen in an animal's eyes when wounded to the death.

An hour later an orderly galloped up to Colonel Aynsley's house. The ladies had retired, and he was smoking a last pipe on the verandah when the sound of the horse's hoofs brought him to the front of the house.

"A letter, sir, from Major Greig."

He took it to the light, and read these few words: "Bad news. Delacroix has shot himself. Can you come over at once?"

• • •

Many months had passed when Mrs. Crothers and Captain Woodward once more sat together in the shady garden of the club. This time they were discussing afternoon-tea, and several other small tables were occupied by couples engaged in the same way, at one of which sat Gertrude Aynsley. She had been home to England for six months, as after the shock of her *fiance's* terribly sudden end, her nerves had been seriously affected, and the doctor had advised a complete change. She had returned a few days previously in blooming health, looking charmingly pretty and bright. Captain Woodward's eyes were fixed on her as he turned to address the lady by his side.

He caught her hand and raised it to his lips

"You were quite right, I have burnt my fingers, but I won my bet."

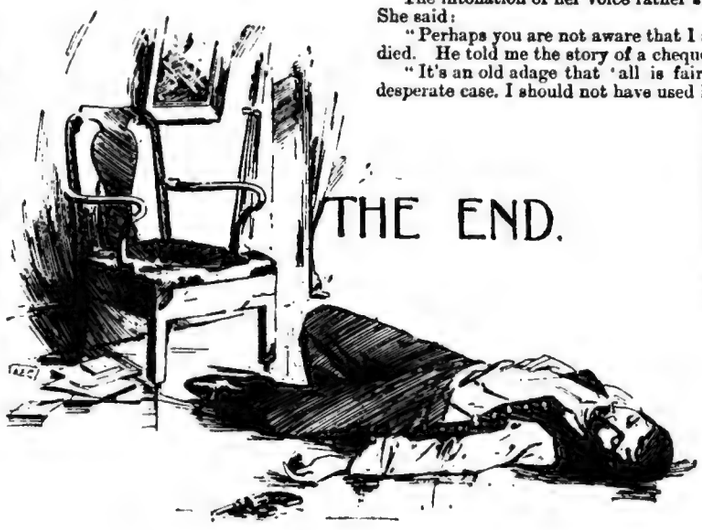
"The question is whether it was *fairly* won?"

The intonation of her voice rather startled him, and he looked inquiringly at her. She said:

"Perhaps you are not aware that I saw young Delacroix about an hour before he died. He told me the story of a cheque."

"It's an old adage that 'all is fair in love or war.' If it had not been such a desperate case, I should not have used it. I would not have said a word about it, if she had not told me the day was fixed. That is my excuse. But although I feel convinced she cared for me that time we parted on the hills, I could not get her to give me one word of assurance before she left Bombay. She would not let me speak of it. You are her dearest friend, give me a clue. Dare I ask her *now?*"

"I say ask her—and I am afraid, I am very much afraid, you will get far more than you deserve."



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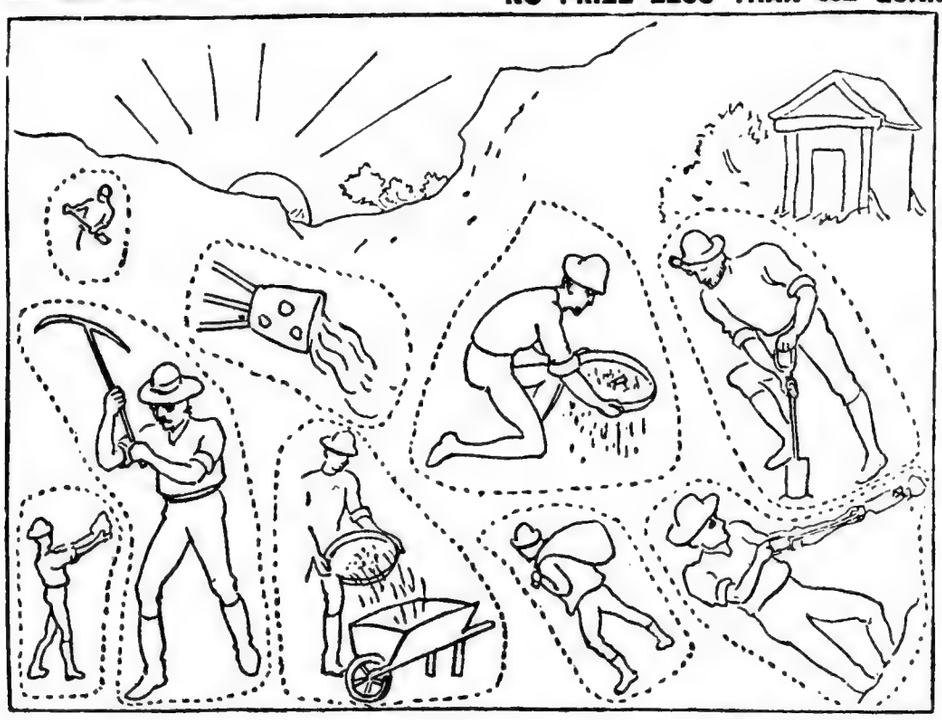

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NOTE.—Unstamped letters will not be taken in. The directions must be strictly carried out, or competitors will be disqualified. The proprietors' decision shall be final. The Prizes will be given for neatness.

THE OTTO-FREEZ COMPANY, 66, HIGH ST., CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON, N.W.

This Advertisement will Only Appear Once.

THE EAR-MARKING OF JOHN MEGAW

By OWEN RHOSCOMYL.

WHEN the boys of the North Fork round-up tell about the ear-marking of Megaw, they are not enlarging upon Megaw, but explaining Tresorva. Tresorva had been riding for the "Three Bar" brand for a month or six weeks before anything special cropped up. Then two cattle owners, from the other end of the range, stopped overnight with the outfit, and it was noticed that they particularly shook hands with him like those who claim an honour Only they addressed him interrogatively as "Mister," until he supplied them with the name of Tresorva. After supper it came out.

Said number one of the two guests—his name was Siddal—addressing himself to Tresorva: "They are wanting to see you powerful bad over at Bornerstown."

"That so?" answered Tresorva in his usual quiet way. "Anything the matter over there?"

"Considerable. There's a galoot of the name of Oxley, an' he's got a gang together in the edge of the Bad Lands. He's just a-playing up perdition with the coaches and the mule teams, an' such like, on the stage road. They're afraid he's going to raid the banks, an' they want you to take a posse of Sheriff's men an' clean out him an' his gang, same as you did Ingham the other day. Every man's cry is for you; for Lingen's pardner."

"Ah, yes, no doubt," drawled Tresorva; "but I guess they'll have to find someone else to be their Deputy Sheriff this time. Lingen's pardner stands out of this game."

The boys stretched their ears to listen. The "taking in" of Ingham and his gang had been the buzz of all that country, and one would hardly have expected to find the grim hero of it going quietly back to work as an ordinary forty-five dollar man.

"Well, if you're Lingen's pardner," took up the boss, "you're just the man I'm looking for. What'll you take to go an' hold down the Willow Springs ranch till the old man can get up here from Cheyenne?"

"Nothing at all, Jim. You see, you don't quite savey the how of me. It's a fact that I did swear in as Deputy Sheriff, and cleaned out Ingham and his gang, but that was because Ingham had killed my pardner, and killed him mean at that. I did it for Lingen's sake and not for money."

"Then how about the Sheriff down at Ogallala?" suggested Jim, quoting another rumour.

"That Sheriff had been swearing that he'd kill me on sight, and I don't allow any man to hunt me but what he'll find me quicker'n he wants in the end. It ain't that I object to risk my life for money; it's killing another man for money that lets me out."

"That's just it," returned Jim. "It's because I don't want any killing that I'm asking you to go over there. Now, if I was to go over with the whole outfit, there's just ten of us, and Megaw would come down on us with his thirty from both ranches, an' there'd be more fur a-flying than some folks have hay. But if you went alone then Megaw couldn't bring a whole host of men against one, and, as for doing anything himself, why, he ain't liable to go gunning for Lingen's pardner while there's plenty of buffalo knocking about."

"There again, Jim. If I went over at all it would just be as one of the Three Bar boys, and nothing at all to do with Lingen's pardner. When I meet a man, I want to be standing in the boots I've got on at that minute and not in the boots I wore when I shot a Sheriff or got away with Ingham. I want to be taken for what I am that day and not for what I was a month or a year ago. That's me; every time.

"But about this ranch at Willow Springs. You say yourself that you paid that old buffalo hunter, Johnson, to stop on it and represent for you, and that a couple of months ago he turned round and sold it to Megaw. Now, don't you think that if somebody was to go over and lay it all out to him, straight and square, that Megaw would draw out at once, provided you paid him what he gave Johnson?"

Jim chuckled.

"I guess you ain't acquainted with John Megaw; not enough to hurt. That's not the kind of a hai pin he is. Man, Megaw himself put up the job, an' when Johnson stood out for a bit, I believe he gave him ten minutes to choose whether he'd take the money and go, or take the lead and stop."

"You believe, but are you sure?" persisted Tresorva. "Did he tell you so himself?"

"Do ye think he *would* tell me?" said Jim softly, pipe in hand

"If he's a man he would. If he's mean enough to start a job like that I should hope he was man enough to brag it out to the end."

"Then, how would it be if you rode over and asked him?" replied Jim.

"You think we'd mebbe get to shooting one another and settle it that way, I suppose," retorted the other drily. "All the same, I don't mind going over and asking him fairly. If he says he didn't put Johnson up to sell the ranch then I'll tell him from you that you'll give him back what he paid. And if he says he did, then I can be your witness to that much when you go to law. You see, I want to keep things smooth, so there'll be no shooting. I don't take no stock in shooting nohow."

"Then you'd better go over there to-morrow. You'll find him at the Bull Rock ranch," settled Jim.

"That's all right," pursued Tresorva. To a, turning to the two guests, "and now if you two are riding in that direction I'd take it kindly if you'd stop and introduce me to Megaw as one of the Three Bar outfit. I want to do everything in the smoothest possible kind of way."

"That ain't my section of the universe," said Siddal; "but you can bet that I'm a-going that way to-morrow."

"That's me, too, Joe Bush!" assented Number Two.

Next day, when the three reached the Bull Rock ranch they found that Megaw had started for the Willow Springs that very morning, taking half-a-dozen of the boys with him to build a corral. This doubled the distance, and so it was along towards sundown when the three lighted down at the cabin, which was the only building yet erected on the place in dispute

John Megaw's politeness was of the wizened kind, which does a thing only because it is expected under the circumstances; the kind which has no inward and spiritual grace to redeem it; and the little he had broke short off as he caught sight of the Three Bars branded on the near shoulder of Tresorva's horse.

"Oh, that's your brand, is it?" said he. "And what in the name of fortune air you a-huntin' here?"

According to all rule this should have been the last speech but one preceding "trouble," but the insulted one merely cocked his hat afresh as he drawled in answer.

"I'll tell you what I ain't a-hunting, and that's a fight with you. I've not ridden sixty miles to wind up on the end of a shooting iron—you may bet what you like on that."

"You've come sixty miles, hev you? Well, now you can just climb on to that air saddle again, and ride another sixty. You ain't a-goin' to stop on no ranch o' mine." Megaw's thumb was hooked in his pistol belt, to emphasise the cock of his chin as he spoke.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Mr. Megaw, and I reckon then that the sooner I get supper and go the better you'll like it?"

"You get no supper on any ranch o' mine," retorted Megaw. "I'll have no pie-biters round me."

Even the cook, a dozen yards away, held his lids still, to wait for the answer to this. To refuse a meal to any man, and then on top of that to use the insulting "pie-biter" was a something which might not be matched in a lifetime. But Tresorva was imperturbable.

"Then I guess I'd better water my horse before you include that," said he, as he began to lead the animal towards the water-hole, to the right of the cabin.

Megaw whipped out his six-shooter, and levelled it.

"Stop! another step and I down you," snapped he.

There was a faint swell, at last, in the other's voice as he turned round. "Do you mean, honest Injun, that the poor cuss of a cayuse can't have a drop of water? You know that this is the only water-hole for something like twenty miles, and, moreover, I don't just know where that one lies."

The disgust on the faces of his own men should have warned Megaw, but he had not sense enough to serve him. "I'll give you just ten seconds to git," said he.

Number One of the two guests broke down. "Megaw," cried he from the corner of the cabin, "that's Lingen's pardner you're a-fooling with."

This meddling was equally against every known law of the prairie, but it served to show how little real strength was in Megaw. For, at the interruption, he let his pistol sag half way down while he cast a quick glance over his shoulder. It was the shot which struck the cylinder of his weapon, and sent it flying, that woke him up to his error in time to obey the simultaneous command: "Up with your hands, Megaw!"

With both hands stretched at full length above his head, he looked, with new interest and white face, at the man who now held the drop on him. The smile was gone, and a dark grin quivered passionately for an instant on Tresorva's features as he spoke. "John Megaw, last night I said that you were entitled to a hearing. I guess you've had it now, and what I think of you isn't worth the words—a skunk is

The shot struck the cylinder of his weapon, and sent it flying

a gentleman alongside you. But for the sake of the boys that ride for you I'll stop and take a bite of supper—I wouldn't like it to be brought up to them that any man was turned away from their camp without supper. So now you'll sit down in front of me—with your hands up—and you'll tell the cook to bring me a bite of supper, and, while I'm eating, you'll ask one of the boys to oblige you by watering my horse. Savey?

"You see," continued Tresorva as the other obeyed, "not a man of your outfit will pull his gun to help you. And it ain't only because that to do so would mean straight death for you, it's because they're all mad and 'shamed to think they should have been anyway mixed up with such derned foolish meanness as yourn. If you'd pulled and downed me straight off, you would have been some sort of a man, if only because you didn't give a cuss for what men thought of you. But to have the drop on me, and then to hum and haw and bellow about till I got the drop on you instead, it's enough to let any man out."

Megaw wilted.

"I didn't know you were Lingen's pardner," quavered he. "If I'd known——"

"Yes, no doubt," interrupted the other. "I guess you'd have skunked around just like the cayote you are. But when I meet a fellow I want to know how much of him is man, and not how much of him is mean enough to sit and suck on his mouthpiece because of something that happened yesterday or last year. And that's how I come to know that all of you is skunk, bar what's cayote."

Here Tresorva broke off to eat, holding the bread and beefsteak as a sort of rough sandwich in his left hand, while his right still held ready the cocked six-shooter which secured the peace. Then a cup of black coffee to finish off with and he spoke again.

"Stand up, Megaw, and turn your back to me while I mount."

Again Megaw obeyed, and as soon as he was mounted Tresorva continued:

"Now, John, you and me'll take a little stroll, just far enough to allow me to get out of range before you get back and find your gun again."

As Megaw walked, keeping pace with the horse at about four feet from the off stirrup, the master of the situation sat skewed half round in the saddle, the corner of one eye looking well ahead, the tail of the other upon the camp behind, and all the rest of his vision keen upon his prisoner. A hundred and fifty yards from the cabin he stopped.

"How much did you give Johnson?" said he suddenly.

"Five hundred," blurted out Megaw before he could think.

"And ten minutes to take it in or have his head shot off," went on the other evenly. "Well, I'm to tell you that the old man of the Three Bar outfit will give you your money back rather than have any trouble."

"But I hain't a-goin' to sell the place. I need it in my business."

"Yes, and I guess Jim needs it in his business too. But that would have been nothing to me if you had let me talk quietly instead of drawing your gun and sahsing me like you did. So now I'm a-taking a hand in this game myself. You gave Johnson ten minutes, but I'll play fairer and give you ten days. If at the end of ten days you haven't given this ranch over to the Three Bar outfit then I'm a-going to jump her for myself. There's only one man would buck against it—and that's you; so I shall just load up my little gun then and go after that man at once—and that's me, every time; G. Tresorva, Lingen's pardner. Now git!"

Megaw got. As straight and as fast as he could go he headed back for the cabin, and the rifle which he knew was leaning in one corner of it. A dozen paces before he reached it he had to cross the bed of a small, dry creek, which drew down here to join the greater dry creek, running at right angles to it, some forty yards away to the right. The water-hole lay at the junction of these two, and the camp fire and waggon were midway between it and the cabin, which had been ignored by the boys in making camp.

Striking the little creek right opposite the door, he found himself full breast against five feet of a cut bank, and, turning along to find some slope out, he cast an eye back and saw that Tresorva was still keeping a leisurely walk parallel to the strip of brush which lined the course of the greater creek. Then he found a way out and in another minute had dashed into the cabin, seized the rifle, and was taking a rest out of the window gap.

The distance was easy, being little over three hundred yards, and he could not tell whether he hit his mark or not, but through the smoke of the shot he saw Tresorva turn and spur full speed into the brush; and he wondered in emphatic speech why the fellow had taken cover.

"For the same reason that I'm a-taking to the big creek—to get out of aim," cried the cook from the waggon, as he seized an armful of blankets, and darted away, followed by boys and guests together, likewise laden. "Let Mr. Megaw play his own hand this time," said one man to another, as they piled down the bank by the water-hole, thoroughly disgusted, and almost ready to be glad if he should be shot.

Megaw wiped his mouth, and thumbed another cartridge home. He knew that his meanness had long since left the monthly wages as the only bond betwixt the men and himself, but he felt it keenly all the same, and he looked with a nervous eye at the nearest corner of the brush, where it came within thirty paces of the cabin. He wondered whether it would be wiser to make a dash for the brush himself, and so stalk his stalker, but he hung so long irresolute that he grew afraid lest he should be too late, and so stayed peering for some sign of his enemy. But nothing stirred, and the suspense ate the bottom out of his stomach till the sickness of dread drove him to the door to attempt an escape. He wanted to get to the creek-bed with the rest. He wanted the company of his fellows.

One step outside, and a bullet passed so close to his nose, that the backward spring he so suddenly took landed him well inside again. "Trapped! by all that's good and holy!" he croaked to himself as he leant against the further wall. And trapped he was. The shack was a mere empty twelve feet by sixteen affair, built of rough cottonwood logs, not straight enough to lie close, and still unchinked or plastered.

The door and only window were both on the side facing the little creek and the brush beyond, while the roof sloped the same way also. He could neither go out through the roof or the door without being potted. He might as well have been a steer in a corral—and he jumped half-a-yard straight up into the air as a bullet smashed the hammer of his rifle and then tore his bootleg half-way round.

Crouching now in the farthest corner, he was hardly down before another bullet thwitted into the log so close past his eyes as to make them wink instinctively. But he had seen enough to give him a new shake. Tresorva had gained the little creek, and was firing over the edge of the cut bank, no more than a dozen paces away. "He's got a Winchester, and he's Lingen's pardner; never misses a shot. He's just a-playin' with me before he plugs me for good," whispered Megaw, as he waited for the next shot.

But instead there came a quiet drawl, as Tresorva stuck his rifle out over the edge of the cut bank, and took easy aim. "Mr John Megaw, I hear that you *are* a bit of a daisy at dancing. Now if you *was* to give us a few steps it might kinder liven up these proceedings a little. You have the floor, Mr. Megaw, dance!" and a bullet took off the lowest layer of his boot-heel. Megaw jumped up. He knew the meaning of that "cowboy invitation to the dance." He had used it himself upon others, and was now to taste the delights of it himself. He began to dance for all he was worth, like some new sort of bear in a cage, prodded to work by his keeper.

He began to dance for all he was worth.

And while he leapt, and gasped for breath, he could hear the drawl outside continuing. "Not the worst kind, Mr. Megaw, considering there ain't no fiddler. But here's a little music, some," and another shot made the leg of the other boot flap down against its fellow.

And so it went on, sarcasm and shots, until Megaw felt the room begin to heave and dip, and at last, just as he staggered to fall, came the relief. "Thank you, Mr. Megaw. Now you can take a drink, if there is any whisky inside there," which there wasn't.

The victim built no hopes on the coming of nightfall, for he knew that the brilliant prairie moon would leave little of darkness, but he wondered how long it would be before his tormentor tired of the sport and ended it with a last shot. Nay, he began to wonder whether it would be with a shot, or something else.

But as night drew on and Tresorva made no sign, he tired of wondering, and simply waited. He did not know that Tresorva had been making explanations to Siddal—who had crawled up the creek to him—and that those explanations had satisfied the boys. But about midnight he thought he would try and crawl out. He brought it upon himself; the shot came so close this time as to cut the skin, and the drawl had a warning tone as it rose again. "I see you have the floor, Mr. Megaw, and as I guess it ain't over amusing out here a-keeping the other cayotes off you, why, perhaps you'll oblige. *Balance all.*"

As the wretched Megaw began to "*balance*," the voice continued: "And as this hyer light ain't quite daylight for shooting, perhaps you'd better put in your best licks—unless you like this ranch so well that you'd like to be buried here—there *might* be an accident otherwise."

This time the torment was kept up till the victim fell from sheer exhaustion, and the ironical "Thank you, Mr. Megaw," was the last sound till daylight. Then as the day opened to the widest across the prairie, Tresorva began again. "Good-morning, John! I believe I've heard that you reckon yourself a bit of a dude at dancing. Now could you just oblige the company?"

But John had come to the breaking point of his endurance. Life was not worth the price. Rising to his feet he strode across the floor, shouting angrily, "An' I believe I've heard say that Megaw will see you hanged before he'll dance another doggoned step. An' he's a-coming out to be shot an' done with too."

He reached the last word and the door at the same time, but, on the threshold he stopped with a jerk, for the muzzle of a Winchester was staring him between the eyes, and over it he could see the grey drawn face of Tresorva, taking a two-eyed sight at him. The black emptiness of that muzzle seemed to enlarge and grow till it shut out everything save the two eyes behind it, and the courage of his despair seemed to have dropped suddenly away from him, till he could have whimpered some foolish excuse but that he was holding his breath so tight in expectation of the shot which would kill him. He wondered chillily where it would strike.

But instead of the rifle, he heard the voice again in a bitter drawl: "So, Mr. John Megaw, you think you'd rather not dance any more?"

Defiance came up again. "Shoot and be hanged to you," snapped Megaw.

"Ah! that so?" went on the other. "Well, I guess I'll fool you this time; I ain't a-going to kill any man just because you order it, not even yourself. But I want to talk about this ranch. Last evening I gave you ten days to decide in, but it appeared you only wanted ten minutes, for inside that you were popping at me from behind my back. Well, I ain't got no grudge against you for that; only a cut across the body, and a hole through the thick of my left arm"—here he lifted the arm and showed the bloody handkerchief tied round it—"so we'll let that drop for the minute, in case we agree about the rest. You've had your little try, and missed, and consequently I've jumped the ranch from you, beginning from the first shot that drove you back into the shack yester evening. Now, the thing is, will you be a fool, or will you take the five hundred dollars that I offered you out on the prairie? Remember, I'm going to hold the ranch in any case. You gave me ten seconds to git in when you had the drop on me; I'll give you the same now to decide in, and when it's up——" but the tone gave Megaw not the slightest clue to what would happen.

And before he could decide he heard the counting rise; "six, seven, eight." He wilted. "I'll take the five hundred."

"You heard that, gentlemen?" said Tresorva, looking at Megaw but speaking to the two guests and the boys, who now appeared grouped between the waggon and the end of the cabin.

"I guess we wouldn't need ears as long as mule's ears to hyear that," drawled Siddal.

Megaw turned, and his grey face went white to see the witnesses of his shame. But Tresorva was continuing.

"Now, Mr. John Megaw, you've been a-going to school since yesterday, and I guess you've learnt something. For one thing, you'll not be so ready to fool round with a shooting-iron that you neither use nor leave alone. And perhaps you'll see the foolishness of shooting at all, unless you're dead certain to hit in a worth-while place. Kill, or keep still, and don't talk too much about either, that's my motto.

"But you've sold me this ranch, with these gentlemen as witnesses, and so they're witnesses, too, that the boss of the Three Bar outfit shall send the money to your bank, as soon as he knows of the deal.

"And now I'm going to give you something to help you remember both what you've learned and what you've sold. I've got your signature to the business here"—lifting the bandaged arm—"and now I'll give you mine. Look this way, and stand perfectly still, till I shoot twice. Now!" and with the word, bang! one shot tore a hole in the flap of Megaw's right ear, while before he could clap his hand up to that, the second shot took off the lobe of the left.

"You have it, Mr. Megaw. You're ear-marked with the mark of G. Tresorva, who was Lingen's pardner; who was the man that shot the Sheriff at Ogallala, and who moreover was, and is, and always will be, a man that never kills unless he can't get out of it; but if he has to kill, then he kills his man too dead to kick any more. And that's me, again, every time—and don't you never doubt it."

Then turning to Siddal, he concluded: "But Jim's got the call over me—he was right after all, and I was wrong, for he reckoned we'd get to shooting and settle it that way. And so we did, and that's why he's got to pay this five hundred dollars—he mustn't have all the duff."

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S PAGE

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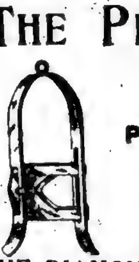

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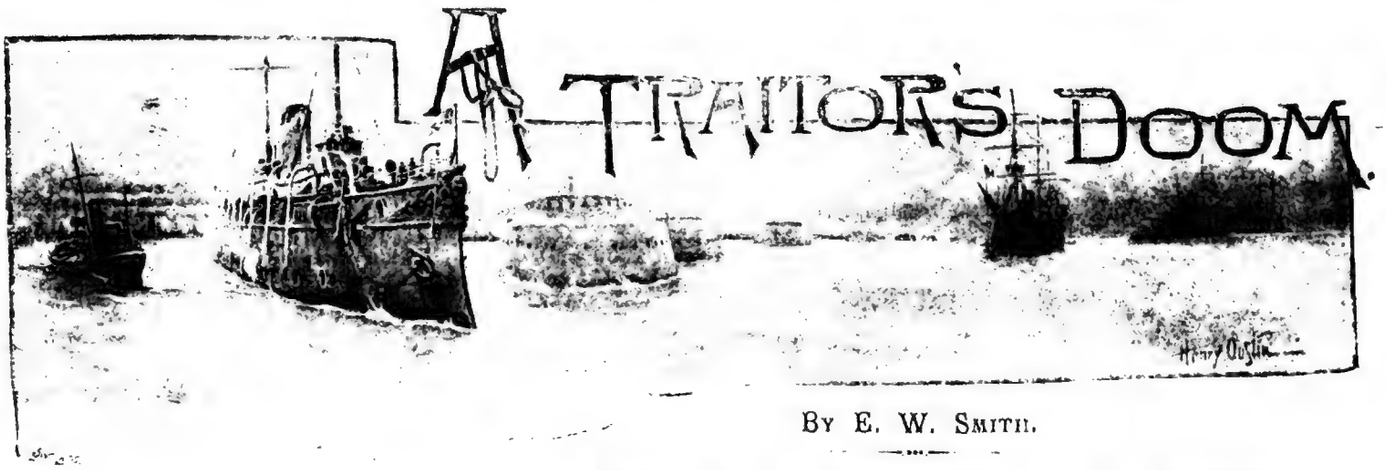

By E. W. Smith.

AN EPISODE OF THE ANGLO-FRENCH WAR OF 1898-1900.

ON the evening of January 26th, 1899, H.M.S. *Pelorus*, third-class cruiser, and torpedo-boat No. 36, hotly pursued by a French Squadron of two first-class cruisers and a battle-ship, had been obliged to take refuge behind the line of newly-erected sea forts at Weymouth.

The cruiser and her consort were charged with the immediate delivery of certain important dispatches to the Admiral of the Channel Fleet then off Ushant, and, consequently, when, on the morning of the 29th, Commander Warre of the *Pelorus* found himself still hemmed in by the Frenchmen, in spite of two gallant attempts to break through, his condition could not be truthfully described as a calm and placid one.

"I'll tell you what it is," he is saying to Norman, lieutenant in command of No. 36, as they pace the deck of the *Pelorus* together, "there's treachery somewhere. We were bound to have got through last night if somebody had not blown the gaff. And do you mean to tell me those fellows out there would have wasted all this time on such small fry as ourselves, if they hadn't known that we've got something more than powder and shot on board? By Heavens! when I *do* lay my hands on the man, I'll take care that he dances for this. It'll be the Death Dance—to the tune of a dozen rifles. And I've nearly got him."

"Good Heavens! Who?" ejaculates Norman.

"Speak of the devil——" mutters Warre in reply, casting a glance from beneath scowling brows at an officer—his second in command—who has just emerged from the after companion.

"What, Nares? Never!" and Norman's face, which had been gradually darkening at Warre's words, again brightens.

"I tell you yes!" hisses Warre. "I've got almost certain proof. But I'll circumvent him yet, hang him. Not a word to arouse his suspicions, though." Then, as Nares advances and salutes—"ah, here you are, Nares! I was just going to send for you. Norman and I have been talking over another plan for to-night. I am going to try and get through alone—I fancy there is more chance for one than two. There will be no moon, so that's a great point in our favour. I shall hug the shore on the eastern side, and try to slip out under the cliffs, while Norman with his torpedo craft will create a diversion on the other, and draw off their attention, in which laudable work you will assist by taking half-a-dozen men and manning one of those screw-passenger boats up the harbour. You will allow the presence of your two vessels on the western side of the Bay to be perceived by the Frenchies—though very guardedly and of course quite 'unintentionally'; and while they are engaged in chasing you back again into the harbour, I hope to get clear away. Do you quite understand?"

"Quite, sir," replied Nares. "By Jove! a splendid idea."

"I'm glad you think so," says Warre very quietly, though Norman detects just a trace of irony in the tone. "It's about time we managed to beat them. I cannot understand why those other attempts failed to come off"—and he looks Nares straight in the face.

The latter hastily stoops to arrange a coil of rope.

"Nor can I," he mutters. Then, with a sudden burst of anger: "What swab of a landsman coiled that end, I wonder; I'll——"

"Never mind that," says Warre, interrupting him. "We've got enough on hand at present without bothering about trifles. You'd better see about that boat at once—it is now half-past two. Arrange it with the owner, and tell him to keep his mouth shut; it will be made worth his while. Don't take your men up until it is dark—six o'clock will do. Get up steam and be down here ready to start at eight prompt. And," as Nares turns away, "for goodness' sake manage the business quietly; don't let the slightest inkling get abroad of what we are about."

* * * * * * * * * *

It is three hours later. Darkness rests on the face of land and sea. A man-of-war's boat, her crew motionless upon their oars, lies just inside a tiny cove some two miles from the town. Suddenly a bright light gleams momentarily from the shore. At a whispered word of command from the officer in the stern, the muffled oars send the boat gently forward until the keel grates on the sand.

"*Qui va là?*" softly says the man in the stern.

"*Le vengeur,*" replies a voice from the shore.

"Any news?"

"Yes."

The officer makes his way to the bows and jumps ashore. He is at once joined by a shadowy figure from out the darkness.

"*Bonsoir, mon ami,*" says the former. "What is it now? Some new dodge?"

"Sh—sh! Gently!" says the other. "I've fancied once or twice that I'm followed; but I dare say it's only imagination. There's a new plan for to-night. The *Pelorus* is to try and make her way out under the cliffs on the eastern side of the Bay, while Number 36 and a tub act as decoys on the western side. Your smallest craft will do for *them*; it's the other fellow you must look after. The decoys start at eight, the *Pelorus* ten minutes later. Send a launch out here to keep watch. Surround her as she comes up, and blow her to blazes!"

"And what about you?"

"Oh, never mind me. I shall be all right. I'm going to have command of the tub," with a laugh. "Don't forget! The eastern side! *Bonsoir, monsieur.* I must hurry up, I'm late already," and he again disappears into the darkness, while the Frenchman jumps aboard his boat. As she pushes off two figures rise from behind a large boulder close at hand, and follow the traitor into the town.

* * * * * * * * * *

7.30 p.m. Lieutenant Nares steps on board the *Pelorus* to report his vessel ready for sea. He finds the Commander in his cabin, engaged in earnest conversation with Lieutenant Norman.

"Well, Nares, is your craft all ready?" asks Warre, looking up.

"All ready, sir," is the reply.

"That's good. I have just decided to change our plan a little, but we shall want the steamer all the same. I have come to the conclusion that after all I shall have more chance to get out round the Portland side, so we will just exchange; I will take the western side and you two will operate on the eastern. And there's another slight change. Norman will take command of the steamer, and you will go with him. No. 36 lies too low in the water, and is altogether too small to adequately represent the *Pelorus*, so that duty will devolve upon your craft. That's why I am sending both of you with her. You will have almost all the decoying to do, so give her every chance without having yourselves blown out of the water. The steamer will leave at eight; the torpedo-boat ten minutes later. You have a risky job, and a difficult one, but I can trust you to bring it through all right."

Nares' eyes have been opening wider and wider as though horror-stricken at some dreadful sight. At length he finds his voice.

"But wouldn't er—er—I beg your pardon—but I—I—should have thought the original plan the better one, if I may be allowed to say so," he stammers.

"And why?" asks Warre sharply.

"Well—er—er—there seems to be more—er—er—shelter on the eastern side. The western is so very open."

"That's the reason I'm taking it," is the calm rejoinder. "It's room I want, not shelter," with a marked emphasis on the last word.

"But—er——"

"Well?" there is a ripple of imperfectly restrained anger in Warre's voice.

"I—I—really wouldn't alter it, sir," and the man's voice becomes almost pleading in its tone. "I——"

"Confound it, sir, I didn't ask you what *you* would do. Your business is to obey orders, not to give advice. What on earth do you mean by your multitudinous objections? Have you had any special information as to the enemy's movements?"

"Le Vengeur," *replies a voice from the shore.*

Nares snatches at the suggestion like a drowning man at a straw.

"Well," hesitatingly, "I—er—did hear that they are watching the western side very closely."

"Oh! Who did you hear that from?"

"The look-out at the fort."

"Who has just reported to *me* that the enemy's ships are patrolling the whole bay in a perfectly impartial manner, scouring every part of it equally. Very strange, isn't it? Have you had any other information? If not, perhaps you will kindly go on board your boat at once, and see that everything is ready to cast off" (looking at his watch) "in ten minutes."

Nares' face has gone ashy pale. His legs seem almost unable to carry him, whilst his stammering tongue appears to have lost its function of speech.

"There—is—something else," he gasps. "I've—heard—that—the enemy expect to be reinforced by a couple of ships this evening—and—that they mean to watch the western side particularly closely."

Warre has jumped to his feet, his face dark with wrath.

"Oh! And from whom did you get *that*, pray?"

"Well, I'm—I'm—scarcely at liberty to say," is the hesitating reply.

"No!" thunders Warre, his anger at length bursting forth. "No! I should *scarcely* think you *were* at liberty to say"—mimicking the other's words—"confound you! Traitor! Coward!" and for a moment it seems as though he will fell the man to the deck. He regains control over himself, however, and with a forced calmness continues: "Now, my friend, you've been very free with your information; let me give you some.

"Since Monday afternoon we have made three successive attempts to break out of this place, and each time we have been foiled. Why? Because for the first time in the annals of the British Navy it has given birth to a traitor; and, God help us, he is on board my ship!" and the man's voice trembles a little. "It was only yesterday I gained a hint of it. Such a thought never would have entered my mind of its own accord. To-day I determined to get to the bottom of the affair—to prove its truth or its falsity.

"Accordingly, I invented a little plan, not for practical purposes, but for the enemy's information and use if he whom I suspected proved to be the—the—I can scarcely say the word, it seems foreign to our language—the traitor I feared. And such he proved—a traitor to his Queen and country. Two men—perhaps no better than they should be, but, thank God, true Englishmen—were the witnesses of his treachery. One of those men was myself; the other stands by me. Together we followed the scoundrel, and with our own ears heard him retail my plan to an officer of the enemy!"

"Oh, God, not that!" groans the unhappy man, sinking on his knees.

Nares' face is all drawn and haggard, his eyes wild. He is about to speak, but Warre raises his hand.

"Not a word! Remember that as soon as that man's name passes my lips this becomes a court of inquiry. It hasn't passed them yet, and I sincerely hope, if he has a spark of manliness in him, that there will be no need for it to do so. Well, so far in proof of his treachery. But what could have been his motive? This was the next question to which I wanted an answer. I could partly guess at it—some measure of bad feeling towards myself because of a little affair which a true man would have forgotten long ago. But there was more than this, I knew; so I tried him in another way. I pretended to have altered my first arrangement in such a way that his ship was to have taken the place of mine, so that his ship, *with him in it*, was to have gone to the doom to which he would have sent mine—'blown to blazes!'" Nares winces. "We very soon found out the other motive then—nothing more nor less than downright, arrant cowardice."

The deadly white face opposite his own flushes red to the temples. Warre notes the sign and proceeds.

"For such a man there are only two alternatives. Either, branded as a traitor and a coward, to be tried and hanged, his family overwhelmed with disgrace, his aged father and mother brought down to the grave with shame at having given birth to that infamous thing, a traitor——"

"Oh, God, not that!" groans the unhappy man, sinking on his knees. "Not that!"

"Or," proceeds the stern voice, "to keep his name unstained; to prove himself still a man, and, above all, an Englishman; to blot out cowardice and treachery in the only way possible."

"How?" is the piteously eager query.

"By death! Listen. Take the steamer along the eastern side, where the French-men will be waiting; drop your men before you reach them; draw their fire—and may God have mercy on your soul. Choose quickly. It is death either way—death with honour or a traitor's doom."

Nares had risen to his feet again. His look is steadier now as he faces Warre.

"Is there nothing else?" he asks.

"Why ask such a question?" is the reply. "What else could there be? If I did my duty there would be no alternative at all. You would now be under arrest for imparting information to the enemy—a crime which, as you know, can only be expiated in one way. I'm not a hard man; I've done more than ninety-nine out of a hundred would have done in time of war. You must see for yourself that there is only one thing for it—death! The difference lies here—if you are alive to-morrow it will be a traitor's death; if you die to-night it is as an honourable man."

"Yes, I see it all," says Nares slowly. "A traitor! Heavens! I never seemed to grasp it until now. A traitor! What will the old folks say? What will the fellows say? What will England say? No, I must keep the old name clean. What a debt I owe you, Warre"—in his agitation all thought of difference of rank has vanished—"for bringing me to myself, and for giving me this chance. You, too, above all. This *is* heaping coals of fire on my head." And the wretched man sinks on the settee and buries his face in his hands.

Warre lays his hand on his shoulder.

"Thank God, your better self has won!" he says gently. "I knew you would come through all right. You'll take her in?"

"I will," says Nares, rising. "Can you trust me?" His voice is steady, and his look once more that of an honest man. Warre takes his hand and wrings it warmly.

"I can!" he says; "with all my heart!" Then drawing himself up and taking out his watch: "Just eight! Lieutenant Nares, you will take command of the steamboat and will sail at once, keeping close to the eastern side of the bay. In such ways as you may think best you will attract the enemy's attention, taking such measures for the safety of *your men*, however, as you may deem advisable. Lieutenant Norman, your command will sail ten minutes later. At that interval you will probably have an opportunity of effectively using your torpedoes. Good-bye, Norman, in case we don't meet again."

"Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye, Nares."

"Good-bye, sir," is the calm reply. The two men salute and disappear up the companion.

* * * * * * * * * *

A steamer is steadily making her way out to sea under the cliffs on the eastern side of Weymouth Bay. She is evidently desirous of creeping out unobserved, under cover of the darkness, for she shows no lights, and keeps very close to the land. But if this is so, the attempt is futile, as not only has she already betrayed her whereabouts in two or three different ways, but a small launch has also noted her presence, and immediately steamed away into the darkness. Suddenly a bright light flashes into the sky for a moment; then disappears.

The watchful eye of the solitary man at the steamer's helm notes the flash—his hands involuntarily tighten on the spokes of the wheel. He is alone on board—his crew were put off half a mile further back. Heaven only knows what he is suffering, as, with engines fixed at half speed, his boat forges steadily ahead. Already he begins to distinguish two huge forms looming away on the starboard bow, while another is coming up on his quarter. But he never falters; with set teeth and staring eye he keeps her headed for the open sea.

A rocket soars skyward from one of the dark masses. Next moment hell itself seems to break loose. Tongues of flame rend the darkness; the very air seems to quake with the thunder and rattle of large and small arms; whilst a perfect storm of shot and shell is poured upon the doomed craft. In six minutes the trim passenger steamer is transformed into a mass of wreckage and sinks beneath the wave.

But vengeance is at hand. Unobserved amidst the terrible din, a long, black object has crept up to within a short distance of the French ships, and within three minutes after the commencement of the firing Norman has launched his first torpedo. It misses, and he comes in closer. Two minutes later he launches his second, and this time it finds its mark, for just as the stern of the wrecked steamer disappears beneath the surface, the huge French battle-ship heels over, and with a mighty plunge follows her to a watery grave.

Search lights immediately flash out, and guns are turned on the fleeing stranger, but, though a few shots fall close around her, No. 36 is soon out of danger, safe folded within the protecting arms of the Weymouth forts; whilst the *Pelorus* speeds merrily down the Channel.

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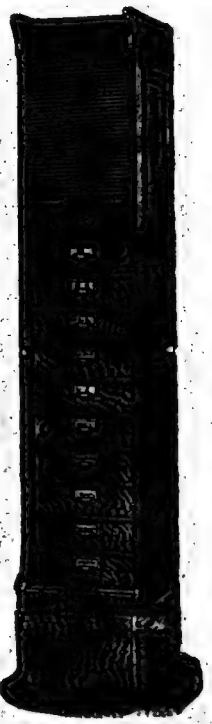

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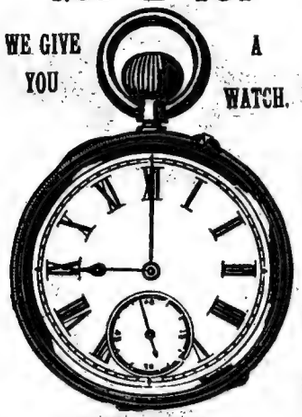

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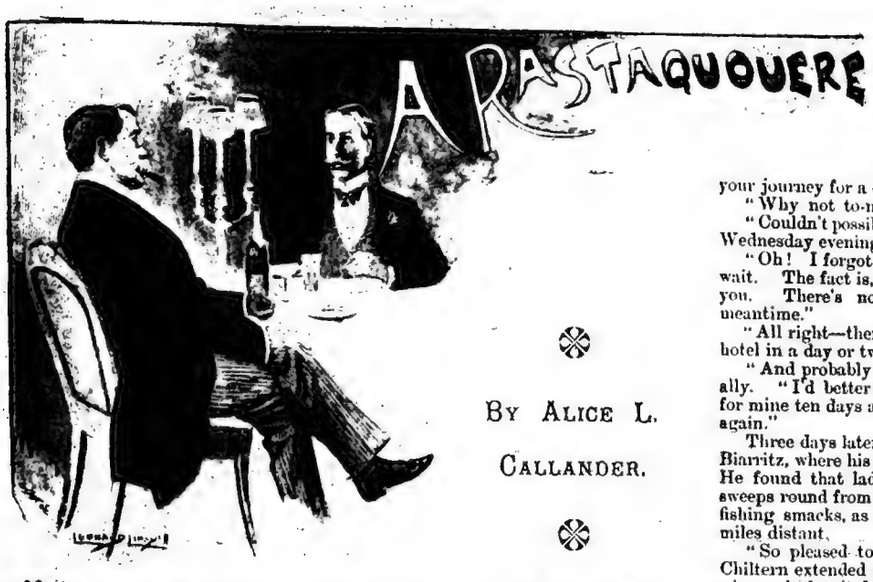

By Alice L. Callander.

"So you're off to Biarritz to-morrow, old chap?" said Dick Wyndham, pushing back his chair and lighting a cigarette. He and his friend Jack Leslie had been lunching together in an almost empty restaurant in Piccadilly. It was the end of August, and London was fast turning into a wilderness. "It's quite a new idea to me," he added, "to think of Biarritz in summer—I always thought winter was the time for going there."

"That's a regular insular notion, Dick," answered Jack Leslie. "The real season is in August and September. The place is crammed with French, Russians, and Spaniards, with here and there a sprinkling of English and Americans. All the shining lights of the grand-monde and the demi-monde! In fact, everybody you've ever heard of, besides a great many others whom nobody has ever heard of. My aunt, Mrs. Chiltern, is spending the summer there with my cousin Violet, and I hear they have taken up tremendously with all these foreigners. In fact, there is a rumour that Violet has become engaged to a South American millionaire of the name of Christobal Queretero. And as, *entre nous*, I do not trust my aunt's judgment very much in these matters—she knows absolutely nothing about the sort of society one meets in a foreign watering-place—I am going out there to see for myself what kind of a fellow this 'Rastaquouere' is."

"What the dickens is that?" asked Dick Wyndham.

"Well, it's rather a term of reproach, and perhaps I ought not to use it in conjunction with this fellow, against whom I really know nothing. Out in Argentina, we used to apply it to the 'hide-and-tallow' men, as rough a lot as you could well imagine. When they have made their pile, some of them come across the water to get rid of it in Paris—London doesn't seem to take their fancy, somehow—And when all the money is gone, they make tracks back to South America, leaving their debts behind them. So they are not generally in an odour of sanctity on the other side of the channel."

"But this chap's not that sort, is he?" asked Dick.

"Probably not, but I think I'd like to see for myself," returned the other. "The fact is, Dick, this engagement of Violet's cuts me up rather. I've been an awful fool about the whole business, and it's entirely my own fault if things have gone wrong. She and I were so much together as children—then I went out to South America, and stayed away five years, and when I came back Violet was grown up. At first, it was the old brother and sister business over again, but it gradually drifted into quite another feeling on my side—and like a fool, I made pretty sure of Violet, and I knew her people would have no objections, especially since I made that big coup in South Africans—so I let things slide, and never came to a positive understanding with her—and now, I hear that she has engaged herself to this Queretero!"

"Well, cheer up, old chap, she hasn't married him yet," responded Dick, with that easy philosophy with which we are apt to take our friends' misfortunes. "Tell me some more about Biarritz. It seems to be a jolly sort of place, and I've half a mind to join you out there."

"Oh, there's lots of fun to be had; any amount of dances and suppers, excursions across the Spanish frontier, bull-fights, picnics, etc. Not to mention the sea-bathing, which is totally different to anything of the kind over here."

"They gamble a bit at the Casino, don't they?" asked Dick.

"By Jove, I should think they did! I hear the play is higher than ever this year. That doesn't affect me, however, as I never touch a card nowadays."

"I don't wonder. That affair of yours out in Rio was rather a sickener."

"Oh, you heard about that? It was my first experience of the genus 'Rastaquouere.' I was only a youngster at the time, and a regular 'tenderfoot.' My chum Wilson and I were fools enough to go to one of those gambling saloons, where the scum of Rio mostly congregate, in the hope of despoiling just such greenhorns as we were. A sort of place where you kept your hand on the butt-end of your revolver all the time!

"There was a chap there from Venezuela, quite a stranger in the place, José Tandil by name—a picturesque-looking fellow enough, tall and fair, with a big yellow beard, blue eyes, and long hair curling over his shoulders. It's a fallacy to imagine they are all dark out there. This scoundrel went for Wilson and me at once, and before I knew where I was, I had dropped 2,000 dollars, a serious matter to me in those days. Having cleaned us both out, he turned his attention to the other fellows, but unfortunately for himself was promptly detected with an ace and two bowers up his sleeve.

"You should have seen the rumpus that followed! Out came the revolvers, and José Tandil dropped with a bullet in his shoulder. There was a shout of 'Police!' the lights were put out, and everybody made for the door, as none of these gentry, for reasons of their own, were particularly anxious to encounter the myrmidons of the law! When the police did come at last, José Tandil was discovered lying, bleeding to death, under the table, from which every vestige of stakes had disappeared. That was the last I ever saw of my 2,000 dollars! My governor behaved like a trump about it, but I promised him never to touch a card again, and I've managed to keep the promise so far."

"What became of José what's-his-name—did he die?" asked Dick.

"No, they succeeded in saving his life, but one of the doctors at the hospital told me that they were unable to extract the bullet from his shoulder. So he is carrying it about with him now—that is to say, if the scoundrel is still unhung!"

"I can imagine that the baccarat rooms at Biarritz seem tame in comparison with the gambling hell in Rio, although you can drop your money just as comfortably in one as in the other," laughed Dick. "But to return to our muttons—I am rather bitten with the idea of Biarritz. If you could put off your journey for a couple of days, I'd go with you."

"Why not to-morrow?" asked Jack Leslie.

"Couldn't possibly—I've got to lecture on the Röntgen rays at the Royal Institute Wednesday evening. Can't you wait for me?"

"Oh! I forgot you had turned scientific. No, dear boy, I'm afraid I really can't wait. The fact is, I don't want to lose any time, for the reason I have already told you. There's no knowing what tomfoolery my aunt may be up to in the meantime."

"All right—then I'll join you out there. You may expect me to turn up at your hotel in a day or two."

"And probably be asked to sleep in the garden," answered Jack Leslie sarcastically. "I'd better engage your room, or you won't find it easy to get one—I wired for mine ten days ago. Well, I must be off now. Good-bye, old chap, till I see you again."

Three days later, Jack Leslie was having himself announced at the Grand Hotel, Biarritz, where his aunt Mrs. Chiltern had taken up her quarters for the summer. He found that lady alone in the large salon overlooking the beautiful bay, which sweeps round from the tiny harbour, only just big enough to shelter some half-dozen fishing smacks, as far as the entrance to the port of Bayonne, some six or eight miles distant.

"So pleased to see you, my dear Jack, how good of you to come!" Mrs. Chiltern extended a plump, white hand, and presented a rosy cheek to her nephew who pecked at it dutifully, and then sat down by her side.

"Well, Aunt Emma, tell me about Violet—is she really engaged?" he at length found courage to ask, after having for some minutes skated round the one object which interested him.

"Violet! Oh, my dear Jack, it is really delightful—I assure you Christobal is all that one could wish—it really is fortunate that we came here this summer,—he is enormously rich, I am almost afraid to tell you the amount of his fortune—but not less than two millions—and his manners are simply perfect!"

"But is he a good fellow, Aunt Emma?"

"Oh, a charming fellow, Jack, I assure you, most popular here. He goes everywhere, all the best people know him. He gives cotillons at the Casino, supper-parties, picnics—you have no idea of the lavish way he entertains!"

"Does Violet like him?" asked Jack quietly.

Mrs. Chiltern looked slightly shocked. "Why, my dear boy, what girl would not? It appears that his family diamonds are simply magnificent—and he is giving her others. They have seen things at Mellerio's which are fit for an Empress. But Christobal is such a judge of diamonds, nothing Mellerio has is good enough for him. They are sending for something quite special from Paris."

"I am anxious to see this paragon of yours."

"You will see him this evening at the Casino. There is to be a cotillon, and Christobal is to lead it."

"Well, I am awfully glad you are so pleased," said Jack, with a slight effort. "There really doesn't seem to be any drawback."

"The only thing I do not quite like is his gambling," said Mrs Chiltern reluctantly. "He does risk most frightful sums—but then he is generally so lucky!"

"H'm, that's not so satisfactory, is it?" said Jack. "But anyway, Aunt Emma, if there wasn't some drawback, you could hardly expect the chap to be a denizen of this world—he'd be a cherub, or something of that sort, you know."

Mrs. Chiltern smiled faintly; the subject was almost too sacred for jest.

"You will dine with us to-night, Jack," she said, as he rose to take leave, "and we'll all go on after to the Casino. Christobal will not be here—he is giving a man's dinner at the Restaurant du Helder—the dear fellow is so hospitable!"

That evening, when Jack Leslie presented himself at his aunt's dinner-table, he was painfully struck by the appearance of his cousin Violet. She seemed to him to have grown thinner, although her beauty was always of a somewhat diaphanous kind. Still, Jack did not seem familiar with this extreme pallor, nor with a certain pathetic and wistful look in the girl's eyes when she first greeted him.

"Are you happy, Violet?" he asked her gently.

"Are you happy, Violet?" he asked her gently, as they sat together after dinner by the open window of the salon, Mrs. Chiltern having left them for a moment to make some addition in her toilet.

The girl looked at him silently. There was an expression in her eyes, which Jack could not quite fathom, but it made him feel distinctly uncomfortable. "Is there anything wrong here?" he wondered to himself, as he repeated his question.

"I suppose I ought to be happy, Jack," his cousin answered at length, a certain weariness in her tone. "You know that mamma is perfectly satisfied, and as I have not got one penny of my own, I suppose it is a good marriage for me. Christobal is very handsome and charming, and until he wanted to marry me, I thought him delightful. The unfortunate thing is that I don't seem to like him quite so much, now that we are engaged, as I did before."

"But in Heaven's name, what made you accept him?"

Again that sudden flush of pain on the girl's face.

"There did not seem any reason for refusing him, Jack," she said. "And he cares for me so much—he really does, you know," breaking off with a half-laugh.

"I doubt him!" said Jack grimly, as he looked at the lovely face, the beautiful golden head, and perfect figure of the girl before him. "But dozens of other men have done the same, Violet."

"I suppose so," she answered listlessly.

Jack Leslie felt completely puzzled. His cousin had certainly been sufficiently attractive to have married long ere this. He could remember his own feeling of stupefaction, on his return from America, when he realised that little Violet, the comrade of old days, had grown into a beautiful woman. He had never noticed any lack of young men about his aunt's house in Thurloe Square. Surely, Violet might have had her choice of these? It must be that this Christobal Queretaro, with his millions and apparently good position, had dazzled the imagination of Mrs. Chiltern, never too gifted with acuteness of perception, and that she had put pressure on the girl to make her accept him.

At this moment Mrs. Chiltern, cloaked and hooded, entered the room. "Not yet ready, child!" she exclaimed. "It would never do to be late to-night," she added archly. And Violet, with an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, departed obediently to don her wraps.

When they reached the Casino, the rooms were already filled with a crowd of people belonging to all nations. It was easy for Jack to make out Christobal Queretero, who was waiting for them at the entrance of the ballroom with a beautiful bouquet of Neapolitan violets in his hand.

"He always manages to have violets for her, Jack," whispered Mrs. Chiltern in a gratified aside to her nephew, as she presented the two men to each other.

Jack Leslie raised his eyes, and took an exhaustive survey of his cousin's *fiancé*. As he noted the man's splendid physique, his coal-black, curling hair, and dark handsome face, with the singular anomaly of a pair of light-blue eyes, a vague remembrance stirred within him, although he was not conscious of ever having seen the South American before.

Jack Leslie could not help acknowledging that Mrs. Chiltern's description of her future son-in-law had been nowise exaggerated. Yet, as he looked again at the singularly handsome face before him, he noticed something unpleasant about the lines of the mouth, a tightening of the lips over the gleaming white teeth and a trick he had of shifting his eyes and looking away when spoken to. Queretero was faultlessly attired in evening costume, and a number of miniature decorations hung from his buttonhole.

"The fellow knows how to dress," Jack said to himself. "Those clothes were made in Bond Street, I'll swear."

Nothing could exceed the cordiality of Christobal's manner towards Violet's cousin. Everything he possessed was at Jack's disposition. In fact, his friendliness was, if anything, overdone, and the young Englishman felt a certain distrust stealing over him, as he listened to the other's protestations.

He dropped the pack, which he still held, and rose to his feet with a furious oath.

That the man was immensely popular, and had certainly conquered for himself the major portion of Biarritz society, Jack Leslie could see at a glance. But, being a man of the world, and very much more accustomed to the ways of foreign watering-places than was his aunt, Mrs. Chiltern, it struck him as he began to scrutinise the company present, that here and there some people were holding aloof from the fascinating South American. And each time, on inquiring the name of the individual, he was told either some great Spanish title, or a name well known in the diplomatic world. But Christobal Queretero appeared to do very well without the countenance of the minority.

The cotillon was now in full swing, and Jack Leslie, who was not dancing, watched the leader narrowly, and could not avoid admiring the man's manner towards Violet Chiltern. He noticed that his cousin herself seemed rather distant towards Christobal, and that the exquisite bouquet he had given her when they first came in, was soon passed on to her mother. He observed to, that Queretero exhibited not only tact and temper, but a certain degree of dignity, in his quiet acceptance of the not too amiable attitude of his *fiancée* towards him.

The cotillon was particularly animated this evening, and Jack was forced to admit to himself that the moving spirit of the whole thing was undoubtedly Christobal Queretero. He was here, there, and everywhere, leading, persuading, encouraging, pouncing on a laggard couple with a ribbon and a laughing word, distributing with lavish hands, the toys and flowers—and always mindful first of all of Violet—Violet, who accepted somewhat disdainfully the piles of roses, and bunches of gaily-coloured ribbons that fell to her share. At length the band struck up the last waltz, and to the strains of "Estudiantina" the cotillon came to an end.

Jack followed Christobal, who was taking Mrs. Chiltern and Violet to their carriage. After the ladies had driven off, he found himself standing in the doorway with the other man.

"What are you going to do?" the South American asked him. "It is too early—or too late, to go to bed. Come and have a look at the baccarat."

"All right," said Jack, glad of an opportunity of seeing something more of this man. "I don't play myself, but I'll come and look on."

They sauntered back through the now empty ballroom, towards that part of the Casino where baccarat went on. The room was full of men—women are not admitted to the tables—and the play was running very high. As they entered, a young Frenchman who had been losing heavily, rose and pushed back his chair. Queretero immediately took the vacant place, and Jack Leslie stood behind him, watching the play.

He was somewhat surprised to see that this man, whom he had been told was a wild and reckless gambler, only risked a few napoleons on the first coup. He won, doubled the stakes, and won again. For a time he went on playing cautiously, but as luck still attended him, and he began to rake in piles of gold and notes, gradually his play became more serious, and he risked larger sums on every deal.

"I see our friend prefers playing with other people's money to playing with his own," thought Jack, as Queretero rose, and going to the other side of the tables, took the bank against all comers.

Fortune still favoured the South American, and at first it looked as if he were destined to carry all before him. He was growing excited, and his dark face flushed slightly.

Jack Leslie watched him narrowly—again that curious feeling came over him of having seen this man before, and stranger still, of having seen him with cards in his hands, and that same intense, almost wolfish look upon his face. "And yet I must be mistaken," he thought. "The fellow is much too striking-looking, once seen, ever to be forgotten."

The night was far spent, and outside the dawn was breaking, yet nobody seemed inclined to quit the baccarat tables. Christobal Queretero still held the bank, but somehow his luck seemed to have deserted him. He lost deal after deal, and his adversaries, emboldened by his reverses, and anxious to recoup themselves for their previous losses, staked higher and higher against him at each fresh deal. "This can't go on much longer," thought Jack, watching the now livid face of the South American, as he dealt out the cards with a shaking hand. "There's a huge sum of money on the table and if Queretero loses this deal the bank must break! Well, if he's as rich as they say, it can't make much odds to him."

Not a sound was heard through the room, save the flutter of the cards as they left the banker's hands, and fell in front of his adversaries. Then, *Huit! Neuf!* sounded from either side of the table, as the players proclaimed aloud the winning numbers—Queretero had lost on both!

Jack had been so interested in the fortunes of the game, that he had ceased for a moment to observe the South American. As the latter saw the cards turned up against him, he dropped the pack, which he still held, and rose to his feet with a furious oath. Jack Leslie looked up, and caught the glare of the other man's eyes fixed on himself.

Then suddenly, the scene before him faded from his sight, and his memory rushed back to the gambling hell in Rio. He could see José Tandil, tall, broad-shouldered, with his large limpid blue eyes under the broad-brimmed felt hat, his high boots, and wide crimson sash, with a pistol stuck through it. He remembered the lights, the noise, the smell of rye whisky, and rank tobacco, the overturned table, the scattered gold. Then he seemed to hear the sharp crack of a revolver, as José Tandil crashed down on to the floor with a bullet through his shoulder. And Jack Leslie knew that he was not mistaken, and that the man before him, the desirable millionaire who was to marry his cousin, Violet Chiltern, was none other than José Tandil himself.

Changed indeed, with his long fair hair cropped short and dyed black, his big blonde beard shaved off, and a faultless evening costume replacing the more picturesque attire of earlier days. It was an admirable make-up, and the only thing that remained unchanged was the colour of the light-blue eyes.

Jack's brain fairly reeled with the shock of this discovery. With a mighty effort, he managed to pull himself together, and left the gambling-room without betraying his surprise.

It was now broad daylight, and as the young man walked home towards his hotel, he pondered anxiously within himself as to what course he would pursue in this emergency.

He was well aware of the difficulties he would have to encounter. Who would believe his story, or take the word of an unknown Englishman against that of Christobal Queretero, the hero of the hour, the favourite of Biarritz society? And how to persuade his aunt that this paragon amongst men, her future son-in-law, the South American millionaire, was José Tandil, the card-sharper and blackguard!

Besides, what proof had he to offer of the truth of his assertions? None whatever, and poor Jack almost groaned aloud as he thought of the hopelessness of the task before him. But his cousin Violet must be saved at any price.

"Thank goodness, Dick will be here to-morrow," he said to himself. "He'll back me up through thick and thin, dear old boy, and perhaps between us we may hit upon some plan for unmasking this infernal scoundrel. Until then, the best thing I can do is to hold my tongue."

On the following morning, as the Paris Express steamed slowly into the little station of "La Negresse," Dick Wyndham saw Jack Leslie walking impatiently up and down the platform in search of his friend. The warmth of his greeting somewhat surprised Dick, who began cynically to wonder "whether the young fool had been dropping money over that confounded baccarat," and asked a question to that effect.

"No, no, Dick, it isn't your money I want, but your advice, this time," laughed Jack in answer to his friend's anxious inquiry. "But come along, we'll have your luggage sent on, and you and I can walk back to Biarritz—it's scarcely more than a mile and a half, and the fresh air will do you good after your night's journey—and by the way I will a tale unfold—although it's no laughing matter," he added gravely enough, as the two young men started off at a brisk pace, along the shady road which leads from the station into the town.

Dick Wyndham listened with the greatest attention while Jack told his story. "Sounds like something out of Bret Harte," he said at last, when his friend ceased speaking. "But Jack, old man, it's simply impossible to expose this fellow, unless you can advance some proof of what you say."

"Ay, there's the rub," answered the other ruefully. "Mere assertions on my part would go for nothing. And yet I know that I am not mistaken, and it drives me wild to think of that dear girl falling into the hands of such a blackguard. It must be prevented at any price!"

Dick grunted sympathetically. At this moment a diligence laden with luggage passed them on the road.

"There go my traps," said Dick, surveying the numerous boxes on the lumbering vehicle. "I hope nothing is smashed," he added anxiously.

"What an old maid you are. Why the dickens should anything be smashed?" asked Jack in some surprise.

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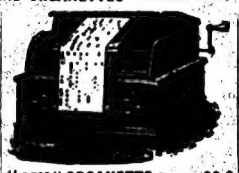

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"Oh, it's my Röntgen ray apparatus I'm thinking about," returned the other. "You know it's my pet hobby, and I take it about with me everywhere. It's beautifully packed, but of course there's always a certain risk in——Hullo, Jack! Have you taken leave of your senses?"

For Jack with a sudden whoop of triumph, threw his hat up in the air, and began executing a war-dance on the side-path, shouting at the top of his voice: "I've got it! I've got it!"

"Got what, you idiot!" said the stupefied Dick.

"The proof! The proof that Christobal Queretero is José Tandil! You remember what I told you about the scoundrel being shot down, and the bullet having remained in his shoulder? It must be there still, and if it is, the Röntgen rays will show it. Well, my aunt is giving a party to-night at the Grand Hotel; we will get her to let you show the effect of the Röntgen rays, and make a few experiments on some of her guests—and we'll see if we can't manage to inveigle Queretero into submitting to the operation."

"You won't find that easy—the gentleman will probably smell a rat," said Dick.

"No, it's more than likely that he has never heard of Röntgen rays. The ignorance of some of these fellows is absolutely phenomenal. Besides, I'll ask my aunt to keep the whole affair secret until this evening, the better to surprise her guests. She'll do anything—even hold her tongue—for the sake of novelty! But here we are at the hotel—look sharp over tubbing and changing your clothes, and we can walk down to the Port-Vieux, and watch the bathing."

It was a glorious September morning, as half-an-hour later the two men sallied forth from the Hotel d'Angleterre, and turned into the Rue Mazagran leading towards the Port-Vieux. The narrow street was alive with people, either going to, or returning from their matutinal dip in the sea. The Port-Vieux is an ideal place for bathing. It is a small sheltered bay in the shape of a horse-shoe, bordered on either side by sheer rocks, between which the blue pellucid water runs in smoothly on to the yellow velvet sand of the beach. In the distance towards the right, La Roche Percée rears its rugged head, picturesquely surmounted by a white statue of the Virgin, which may be seen for miles around. And stretching far away to the left, the faint blue outline of the Spanish coast may be dimly discerned on clear mornings. The whole panorama was flooded with warmth and sunshine, and the tiny waves sparkled like diamonds on the broad bosom of the Atlantic.

The two young men paused for a moment on the top of the stone steps leading down to the beach, and surveyed the busy scene beneath. Hundreds of people were to be seen emerging from the little wooden cabins, arrayed in every variety of bathing garment, from the gorgeous-hued flannels and serges, profusely trimmed with coarse lace, down to the simple striped cotton maillots the use of which is strictly limited to the plainer sex. It was amusing to watch the demeanour of the different bathers, as each unfortunate individual had to run the gauntlet of the crowd which lined the wooden gallery, or of the many groups scattered about in lazy attitudes on the warm soft sand of the beach.

Laughing, ogling Señoritas tripped lightly down towards the sea, obviously pleased at the admiring comments—as often as not expressed aloud—on their personal appearance—a species of homage to which they were well accustomed from their own countrymen. Mincing, coquettish Frenchwomen, superb indifferent Russians, and here and there a shy Englishwoman or prudish American, easily recognised by the jealous care with which they draped themselves in their long white *peignoir de bain*, only dropping it at the very water's edge.

"We shan't find cabins, Dick," said Jack Leslie; "I ought to have sent my man down to keep one for us."

"Oh, never mind, it's just as good fun looking on," returned the other; "by Jove, I didn't know there were *whales* in the Bay of Biscay," he added, as a rotund figure clad in a white flannel bathing-suit waddled down the steps towards the sea, greeted everywhere by storms of chaff and shouts of laughter, which the recipient seemed to take with the greatest good humour.

"That's Puntillero, the rich banker from Madrid," said Jack Leslie. "He's a great favourite with the ladies!"

"H'm—they like quantity as well as quality, I suppose. But who is the pretty little woman in the neat blue serge costume and crimson sash?"

"Madame Laffargue, you mean? She's the best swimmer, the pluckiest rider, and the most graceful dancer in the whole of Biarritz."

"I didn't know Frenchwomen went in for athletics," said Dick.

"Oh, Madame Laffargue is an American, married to a Frenchman. That's her father over there, Albert Verschoyle. Of course he's talking to the prettiest woman in the place, gay old butterfly! But there's my aunt sitting with the Duc de Tamarino; you can tell he's a big-wig a mile off, if only from Aunt Emma's attitude! Shall we join them?"

When Mrs. Chiltern was made acquainted with her nephew's project for the entertainment of her guests that evening, she was full of enthusiasm, and having been sworn to secrecy, bustled off to order the erection of a small platform in the salon of the Grand Hotel. She could not refrain, however, from dropping a hint here and there as to a *delightful* surprise she had in store for her friends, thus adding the charm of mystery to the already sufficiently attractive prospect of a dance on the perfect floor of the Grand Hotel ballroom, followed by a supper such as could only be achieved by that great artist who presides over the culinary department.

That evening, all was bustle and excitement in the courtyard of the hotel, as carriage after carriage drove up and deposited its load before the big entrance, now gaily decorated with strings of coloured lamps, flowers, and palms. All Biarritz had responded to Mrs. Chiltern's invitation, and by ten o'clock the rooms were filled to overflowing.

"There's only one drawback," the hostess whispered to Wyndham and her nephew, as they busied themselves behind a curtain drawn across the small platform, getting ready the Röntgen ray apparatus. "I have just had a telegram from Christobal, who went over to San Sebastian this morning, saying that he won't be able to get back here before eleven, at the earliest. So tiresome! I hope he will be in time to see some of the exhibition."

The two young men grinned at each other over Mrs. Chiltern's head. Nothing could have suited them better for the execution of their project. Dick Wyndham would have plenty of leisure to make his demonstrations and experiment on the audience before the arrival of Queretero, who was to be pounced upon by Jack, and taken up on to the platform without being given time, as Dick had expressed it, to "smell a rat."

Dick Wyndham had not often lectured before such a sympathetic audience They were Spaniards for the most part, and Jack Leslie had spoken truly concerning the phenomenal ignorance prevailing even among the upper classes of that nation. Be this as it may, the lecturer's demonstrations were received with unbounded delight and enthusiasm by the unsophisticated spectators. Nearly everybody present understood English, and those who did not, were sufficiently amused and interested by the singular phenomena which were entirely novel to most of them. Money showing through a leather purse, cigars in a metal case, the bones of several hands and arms, were each photographed in turn, and shown to the admiring crowd by means of a magic lantern. Never before had Dick Wyndham enjoyed such a thorough success. His spell-bound audience had forgotten all about the dance which was to follow the lecture, and the time was going on for half-past eleven, when there was a stir at the entrance, and Jack's heart bounded as he recognised the dark head of Christobal Queretero towering above the crowd in the doorway.

"Now for it," he whispered excitedly, to Dick Wyndham. Then in a louder tone: "Will Señor Queretero do us the favour of stepping on to the platform, and allowing us to photograph him?"

The unsuspecting South American gave a ready assent, and the crowd made way for him as he walked up the room, smiling at Violet who was seated near the platform, and who scarcely returned his greeting.

Jack Leslie's honest English heart rather smote him as he thought of the trick he was about to play on this man, blackguard though he knew him to be. But a glance at his cousin's pale sad face strengthened his resolution, and it was with the firm purpose of exposing the impostor that he began to aid Dick in his preparations. When all was ready, the lecturer turned to the audience and asked their patience, as this experiment would take rather a longer time than the others. "Meanwhile, my assistant will show you some electric sparks which are very beautiful," he concluded. Jack had been right in his conjecture when he presumed that Queretero knew little or nothing about the effect of Röntgen rays.

"Oh, no, you don't," said Jack, presenting a revolver at the other man's breast.

The South American had not the remotest idea of what was being done, and lent himself with the greatest complaisance to all that Dick Wyndham asked of him. At length, the photograph was completed, and when it had been sufficiently developed, the room was darkened, and the enlarged reflection was thrown by means of the magic lantern on to a piece of white canvas stretched above the stage.

"This is a splendid specimen," said the lecturer; "this photograph shows, besides the bones, the existence of a bullet embedded in the shoulder below the clavicle. Señor Queretero has kindly given us an unique opportunity for making a test. Probably no one but himself was aware of the existence of this bullet!"

This announcement was a regular *coup de théâtre*; the audience applauded rapturously, and it was fully a minute before the lights were again turned on. Then Jack Leslie raised his eyes, and looked steadily at Queretero. The man was literally hemmed in, by the crowd, and his face grew white and set, as he quailed before the glance of the young Englishman. Stepping off the platform, Jack went quietly up to the South American: "The heat has upset you," he said, in a low tone. "Come outside with me." Without a word, the other turned and followed him.

At the back of the platform was a little room, which had been used by Dick and his assistant to develop the photographs taken in the course of the evening. It was now empty, and Jack, almost pushing Queretero before him, quick as thought closed the door, and, turning the key, put it in his pocket.

With a spring like that of a wild beast, the Venezuelan attempted to close with him.

"Oh, no, you don't," said Jack, speaking low, and presenting a revolver at the other man's breast. "You're not going to make any row, my friend, and I'm not going to hurt you, unless you oblige me to. But in so far as my cousin Violet is concerned, the game is up. I know you, José Tandil!"

The other man's face worked with suppressed fury, and great drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead, but he remained silent.

"Look here," continued Jack, "I give you five minutes to clear out of this and until to-morrow morning to be across the frontier. I don's want to hunt you down, but I've half a mind to strangle you for daring to play this fiend's game with my cousin!" The South American looked at him sullenly. "You are right," he said, "the game is up. I was afraid of this when I recognised you the other night at the Casino."

"You recognised me! By Jove, you've got pluck," returned Jack. "I wonder you didn't clear out at once."

"I meant to chance it—I would have killed you just now, if I could, only you got ahead of me—I have murdered for less than the stake I stood to win—the only woman, before God, that I have ever loved! Look here, Leslie, you hold the trump cards, and I throw up my hand. But if you've a heart in your breast, make spare me to her. Let her think what she likes—there will be scandal enough when I'm gone, as I owe money all over the place. That confounded bank did for me the night before last. Well"—with a reckless laugh—"I have been in these straits before; but I carry with me this time something I swear to you I didn't know I possessed until now—a heart—and that's broken." He turned away and his voice sounded husky.

Jack half shamefacedly offered him a handful of gold.

"No, I won't take your money; you mean it kindly, but I would rather not. Will you unlock the door?"

Jack watched him make his way to Mrs. Chiltern's side; he saw him take Violet's hand, bowing low over it with murmured words of excuse and apology. Then he went towards the door, and that was the last Biarritz ever saw of Christobal Queretero.

Next day, the whole place was in an uproar. Mrs. Chiltern's party faded into insignificance beside the fact of Queretero's disappearance. His hotel was besieged, but the proprietor knew nothing. The Señor had come in, had changed his clothes and gone out again. He had not been seen since. No, the hotel-keeper knew nothing, beyond the fact that his own bill had not been paid!

It was a nine days' wonder. The millions had apparently melted as well as the millionaire, for it turned out that nobody had been paid, and loud were the execrations heaped upon the head of the vanished "Rastaquouere."

Mrs. Chiltern ended by persuading herself that she had "never quite liked him," and Violet, although distressed at being made the subject of a certain amount of gossip, was otherwise but little affected by the loss of her lover.

A few days later, she and her mother left Biarritz, accompanied by Jack Leslie, now firmly persuaded in his own mind that it was a duty he owed his family to undertake for the future the direction of Mrs. Chiltern's somewhat erratic footsteps—and he could find no better method of accomplishing this object than by converting her, with Violet's consent, from an aunt into a mother-in-law. She has now abjured foreign watering-places, "where one meets such odd people, you know," and is considered by her friends and acquaintances to be an authority on the exact meaning of the mysterious word "Rastaquouere."

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